

Cooking with Cheese

THERE ARE HUNDREDS of cheeses throughout the world, and all of them fit into a few varieties or classifications. Regardless of the type of milk used, the smell, color, taste, or country of origin, all cheeses can be identified by variety. The categories and examples cover a wide range of textures and tastes.



Objective:



Categorize and identify cheeses by variety.

Key Terms:



aging	fresh cheeses	Parmesan
bleu mold ripened cheese	fromage	rind
Brie	Gorgonzola	ripened
Camembert	Gouda	Romano
cheese	grating cheese	Roquefort
cheese food	hard ripened cheese	semi-soft ripened cheese
Edam	Havarti	soft ripened cheese
ferment	Limburger	Stilton
feta	mascarpone	unripened
firm ripened cheese	origin control designation	

Understanding Cheese Types

Cheese (**fromage** in French) is a dairy product made of milk or cream curds that are drained and often allowed to **ferment** (a chemical change due to the introduction of bacteria). Most great cheese-producing areas originally began the process because there was a lot of milk and cream to be “used up” in the region. According to the USDA, “*The making of natural cheese*

is a process of separating most of the milk solids from the milk by curdling with rennet or bacterial culture or both and separating the curd from the whey by heating, stirring, and pressing.”

Cheeses that are not natural cheeses are defined as cheese food. **Cheese food** is a product that contains less cheese and has added nonfat dry milk or whey solids and water. These cheese products have a lower milk fat content and more moisture than naturally processed cheeses. As compared to natural cheese, cheese food is milder, softer, and spreads and melts more easily.

“The most popular variety is pasteurized processed American cheese food. It is packaged in slices, rolls, links, and loaves.”

According to the USDA, the characteristics of cheese (e.g., body and texture) are due to the:

- ◆ Kind of milk used
- ◆ Method used for curdling the milk and for cutting, cooking, and forming the curd
- ◆ Type of bacteria or molds used in ripening
- ◆ Amount of salt or other seasonings added
- ◆ Conditions of ripening (e.g., temperature, humidity, and length of time)

At first, cheese is very moist and tender. **Aging** is the process of keeping cheese in a controlled environment for periods of time, from months to years. Aging is an important part of cheese production and is essential for developing each cheese’s flavor and texture. As the cheese ages, moisture evaporates. As a result, cheese that is aged longer has a harder texture. The term for aged cheese is **ripened**.

Most cheeses are made from cow’s milk, but several other types of milk are used to make different cheeses, including:

- ◆ Cow’s milk—cottage, ricotta, mozzarella, Brie, Camembert, Limburger, brick, Muenster, cheddar, Colby, Edam, Gouda, Swiss, Parmesan, Romano, bleu, Gorgonzola, and Stilton
- ◆ Sheep’s milk—Roquefort
- ◆ Buffalo’s milk—mozzarella
- ◆ Goat’s or sheep’s milk—feta

Some natural cheeses have an **origin control designation** (the cheese must meet specific standards to be labeled in a certain way) that is often based on the country and region where the cheese is produced. Many origin control designations are easy to identify as the cheese name is capitalized. For example, to use the following cheese names, the cheese must be produced in the region:

- ◆ France—Brie, Camembert, Muenster, and Roquefort
- ◆ Netherlands—Edam and Gouda
- ◆ Italy—Gorgonzola, Parmesan (Parma), Provolone, and Romano (Rome)
- ◆ England—Stilton and Cheddar
- ◆ Denmark—Havarti

- ◆ Switzerland—Gruyère, Swiss, and Emmenthal
- ◆ Belgium—Limburger
- ◆ Germany (Alsace)—Munster
- ◆ Wisconsin—Colby

CHEESE VARIETIES

When you are at a deli or a cheese shop, it can be extremely useful to know the varieties of cheese that you like or dislike. This information will enable you to be more efficient in your selection.

Unripened Cheese

Unripened or **fresh cheeses** are less than 60 days old and have the mildest flavors, the softest textures, and the lightest colors; they are typically the least expensive. All cheese—other than fresh cheese—has been aged or ripened. Unripened cheeses include cottage, cream, **feta** (goat cheese), **mascarpone** (Italian cream cheese), mozzarella, and ricotta.



FIGURE 1. Fresh mozzarella cheese with knob.

Soft and Semi-Soft Ripened Cheese

Soft ripened cheese and **semi-soft ripened cheese** varieties are both quite soft. Semi-soft cheese is ripened longer and stronger flavors are allowed to develop along with more body and texture than soft cheese. For example, American and brick cheeses are semi-soft types. Most cheese ripens from the inside-out due to added ingredients. However, some soft cheeses are ripened from the outside-in after they are bathed in brine. This process speeds up the ripening process and results in a chewy, firm, edible skin or **rind** on the outside of the cheese. The two most famous soft cheeses come from France and ripen from the outside-in: Camembert and Brie. Limburger and Havarti are also popular cheeses in this category.

Camembert and Brie

Camembert (Kām-ěm-bâr) and **Brie** (Brē) cheeses are extremely similar in appearance and taste. Both have an outer chewy rind, covering a tender gooey creamy colored cheese inside.

Limburger

Another well-known soft cheese made in a traditional way is **Limburger**—named for Limburger, Belgium. A fine product is also available from Wisconsin. This cheese is notable for its pungent odor and strong taste.

Havarti

Havarti is a semi-soft cheese from Denmark that is mild and tender. These cheeses generally range from pale creamy to light yellow.

Firm Ripened Cheese

Firm ripened cheese is cheese that is compact and smooth in texture with some mechanical openings (holes); mild to very sharp in flavor; and white to medium-yellow-orange in color.

Edam

Edam is a mellow, mild, nutty flavored, yellow Dutch cheese usually formed in flattened balls with a red wax coating.

Gouda

Gouda is a Dutch cheese similar in taste to Edam, but it contains more fat. It is easily recognizable by its flattened disk shape. In addition, it is sealed with a wax coating—black, orange, red, or yellow. Other firm ripened cheeses are Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, and Gruyère.

Hard Ripened Cheese

Hard ripened cheese is a cheese that offers a wide variety of flavors and textures; it is ripened and pressed for many months, with some aged for years. This cheese keeps for a very long time. Varieties ripened over years become hard, dry, and brittle. They are sometimes called **grating cheese** and are often served in grated form. Hard cheeses range from pale yellow to deep orange. **Parmesan** cheese is aged for 14 months to 2 years and has a very sharp, piquant (spicy and provocative) flavor. **Romano** cheese is aged for 5 to 12



FIGURE 2. Port du Salut is a semi-soft cheese.



FIGURE 3. English Cheddar is a firm ripened cheese.



FIGURE 4. Italian Parmesan cheese is a hard ripened variety.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Beginning Cheese Making

While there is certainly an art and a science to cheese making, it has been around for hundreds of years. So how hard can it be? For some simple unripened varieties, it is not that difficult. Most of the tools and ingredients are probably on hand in your kitchen right now, with one exception: rennet.

Rennet is used in almost all cheese production to coagulate milk protein and start a chain reaction that separates curds (milk solids) from whey (liquid protein). Many supermarkets carry rennet in the pudding section, but it is also easily found for purchase online. Within days, whole milk could be turned into mozzarella in your own kitchen!

To learn more about making your own cheese, visit the following link:

<https://cheesemaking.com/blogs/learn/faq-beginner-cheese-maker>

months and has a very sharp, piquant flavor as well as a hard, granular texture; it is typically used sparingly in food dishes.

Bleu Mold Ripened Cheese

Bleu mold ripened cheese is a type of cheese that is particularly high in fat; it is soft and crumbly and has a very sharp taste. It usually has a creamy color with greenish-blue lines or veins running through it. The pungent flavor and colored lines come from mold introduced into the cheese as the ripening agent. For many people, the pungent flavor of bleu cheese is an acquired taste, though some are milder in flavor than others.

Gorgonzola

Gorgonzola is a mild bleu cheese from Italy with a thin rind.

Stilton

English **Stilton** is particularly strong in smell and flavor and is usually scooped rather than sliced.

Danish Bleu and Roquefort

Danish Bleu from Denmark and **Roquefort** from France (manufactured from ewe's milk into which a special breadcrumb and mold are added) are more middle-of-the-road, as bleu cheese flavors go.



FIGURE 5. French Roquefort Marival cheese is a bleu mold ripened variety. Notice the irregular pattern and different depths of color in the bluish-green markings in this example.

Summary:



There are five primary varieties of cheese. Fresh or unripened cheese is soft, white, mild, and inexpensive. It includes cream cheese, feta, cottage cheese, mascarpone, and even fresh mozzarella. They have not been aged for more than 60 days.

Soft ripened cheeses have more texture and flavor. Some have been dipped in a brine to ripen from the outside-in, creating an edible, chewy rind. Camembert and Brie are classic versions from France. Semi-soft ripened cheeses have been aged longer and are firmer than soft types. American, brick, and Havarti cheeses are semi-soft types.

Firm ripened cheeses are compact and smooth in texture with some mechanical openings (holes). They are mild to very sharp in flavor and white to medium-yellow-orange in color. Edam, Gouda, Cheddar, Colby, Gruyère, and Swiss are examples of firm cheeses.

Hard ripened cheeses are aged the longest and keep the longest. They can be firm to quite hard in texture and include Romano and Parmesan cheeses.

Blue mold ripened cheeses are pungent in flavor due to the mold. They are high in fat. In addition, they are soft and crumbly, with bluish-green veins. Stilton, Roquefort, and Gorgonzola are specific bleu cheeses.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is the general color of unripened cheeses?
2. Name two examples of hard ripened cheese.
3. What two cheeses are sealed in red or black wax after processing?
4. Why does Brie have a rind?
5. What variety of cheese are Cheddar, Swiss, and Colby?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Cheese is a staple in diets around the world. Some countries (e.g., France) have turned cheese into a culinary delicacy. Cheese has been around for thousands of years, and it did not start as a delicacy to be enjoyed with wine and fruit. It was a method of preserving milk at a time when refrigeration and pasteurization were still centuries away. There is still debate on exactly how the process of making cheese was discovered. Many believe it was completely accidental.

Use the Internet to learn about the history of cheese, which is fascinating and allows you to follow the development of civilization. Learn where cheese is first

thought to have been made, what variety it was, and how cheese production spread and affected commerce and nutritional needs. Pay attention to countries and civilizations that have a rich history in cheese production. You will be amazed at what you learn.

Web Links:



All About Cheese

<https://www.cheese.com/>

List of Cheeses

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cheeses

History of Cheese

<https://www.idfa.org/news-views/media-kits/cheese/history-of-cheese>

Cheese Definitions and Categories

<https://www.cheesesociety.org/events-education/cheese-definitions/>