

Goat Cheese Nirvana

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I am a bona fide goat cheese lover. If you're not, I implore you to sample some real, honest to goodness, French goat cheese and just try to resist it's magical spell.

French goat cheese, or chèvre, comes in a variety of shapes and styles, diverse flavor profiles and textures. Often named after their region of origin, French goat cheeses range from tangy to mild, creamy to firm, slightly tart to somewhat sweet, grassy or with a hint of walnut, plain or enhanced. The beauty of goat cheese is that it can stand on its own or heighten a dish. Try some. Try a lot. And soon you'll be a goat cheese lover too!



The Seemingly Endless Varieties...

There are three main types of goat cheese: fresh, soft-ripened and aged.

Fresh goat cheese is soft, spreadable, rindless, white and often molded into a log. Feta and Le Cornilly are two examples.

Soft-ripened goat cheese has either a cream colored natural rind or a whitish bloomy rind. These cheeses are mostly round, button shaped or cylindrical. While some opt not to, both types of rinds are edible. Ripening first on the outside, the inside remains soft and creamy. Some examples of soft-ripened cheeses are Bûcheron, Selles sur Cher and brie.

Aged goat cheeses are often covered in edible ash or “washed” in water, wine or a brine to prevent drying out, aid

in rind development and help create a depth of flavor. These cheeses age anywhere from a few weeks to several months. Tomme de chèvre is an example of a washed rind and the pyramidal Valencay an example of ash covered.

While staying at your villa in Provence, I recommend visiting cheesemongers at the markets or cheese shops within the villages to sample and purchase a variety of delightful French cheeses. I just love La Cave aux Fromage in St Rémy.

Be sure to try the regional chèvre, Banon, made in Provence. Banon is aged for a minimum of two weeks and wrapped in a chestnut leaf, held tight with raffia. This cheese is soft, slight acidic and pairs well with Côtes du Rhône.

How to Serve

Cheese should be left out at room temperature for an hour for optimal flavor, though fresh cheese should be kept refrigerated. Cheese boards are best when they feature at least three cheeses, moving from mildest to strongest, and accompanied by jam, fruit, nuts, baguette or crackers. Round cheeses should be quartered, logs sliced into discs, and pyramids cut into slices, like pie.

Beyond the Cheeseboard – Some Great Recipe Ideas for Goat Cheese

So versatile, goat cheese can be part of almost any course, sweet or savory, starter, entrée or dessert. Here are a few of my favorites:

–Fresh goat cheese in a salad with arugula, pine nuts, sliced pears and vinaigrette

–A slice of baguette topped with a soft-ripened cheese, then

lightly toasted until the cheese begins to melt –and if you're feeling decadent, drizzle with truffle honey

–On toast, slather fresh goat cheese and top with sliced strawberries and a touch of balsamic vinegar, or top with ripe peaches and a hint of nutmeg, or top with olive tapenade

–For a delicious tart, try soft-ripened cheese, caramelized onions, a handful of arugula and a few lardons

–For a great starter, try fresh or soft-ripened cheese in a tart with asparagus, artichoke and tomato

–Sauté bitter greens (like rapini or dandelion greens) then add fresh goat cheese, lemon zest and a sprinkling of fresh thyme before serving warm or at room temperature

–Homemade goat cheese ice cream: try a version with berries or another with lemon, honey and lavender

–Serving fresh goat cheese mixed with lemon zest alongside poached or roasted fruit for refreshing dessert



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