

Say Cheese!

by Kelsey Bentlage

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ST. LOUIS - Looking for the perfect food for entertaining friends or family during the holidays? Cheese is always a crowd pleaser. No food is as luxurious or as versatile as cheese. It is both elegant and casual, from serving on a simple sandwich to baking into a phyllo crust. Cheese is delicious cubed, shredded, grated, or creamed. It is a finger food, a dip, and a sauce. “Cheese is the number two source of calcium in our diet and provides a high quality protein,” states Kelsey Bentlage, Registered Dietitian and Nutrition Educator with the St. Louis District Dairy Council. If you want to make the perfect cheese board that everyone will enjoy, here are a few tips to get you started.

Choosing Cheese

All cheese is made from milk, but different manufacturing and aging processes are used to produce the variety of cheeses that are available today. Cheese is made by coagulating or curdling milk, stirring and heating the curd, draining off the whey, collecting and pressing the curd, and in some cases, ripening. Cheese can be made from whole, 2% reduced-fat, 1% low-fat, or fat free (skim) milk. It takes about 10 pounds of milk to make one pound of whole milk cheese, which is why cheese is a nutrient dense food.

Categories of Cheese

All cheese can be classified into eight categories: **Blue Veined** – these cheeses feature blue/grey veins and have a strong flavor (examples: Roquefort and Gorgonzola), **Hard** – they are easily grated and excellent choices for cooking (examples: Parmesan and Asiago), **Semi Hard** – these cheeses have a firm texture and a wide variety of flavors (examples: Cheddar and Gouda), **Pasta Filata** – these cheeses are stretchy, mild, and buttery (examples: Mozzarella and Provolone), **Processed** – this is a blend of fresh and aged natural cheese, emulsifiers, and salt (examples: American Cheese and Processed Cheese Spread), **Fresh Soft** – these cheeses are high in moisture and made by adding lactic acid cultures (examples: Cottage Cheese and Cream Cheese), **Semi-Soft** – these cheeses are mild, rich, and creamy (examples: Muenster and Havarti), and **Soft-Ripened** – these cheeses have a bloomy, edible rind that ripens the cheese from the outside in (examples: Brie and Camembert).

Serving Cheese

Many varieties of cheese benefit from being served at room temperature. This brings out their unique aromas, shows off their true texture, and enhances their flavor. When plating a cheese, let it's character dictate how it is served. A firm cheese such as Havarti, can be cut into neat wedges with a large portion kept intact to give guests a sense of the whole cheese. Break cheeses such as Gouda, Parmesan, and Cheddar into bite size morsels. Allow the cheese to break along its natural lines for a rustic feel. Soft ripened cheeses are beautiful served whole, inviting guests to cut a piece according to their appetite. Serving cheese on a large plate or cheese board in the middle of a table allows accessibility from all sides, surely a good idea as everyone digs in!



Swiss and Cheddar Fondue Recipe

Click [here](#) for the swiss and cheddar fondue recipe!

St. Louis District Dairy Council

For more information on dairy's health benefits or to request a "Pleasing Pairing with Cheese" brochure, visit www.stldairycouncil.org or contact Kelsey Bentlage with St. Louis District Dairy Council: call (314) 835-9668 or e-mail kbentlage@stldairycouncil.org.

For delicious and nutritious recipes, check us out on Facebook and Instagram @STLDairyCouncil.