

Cheers to Charcuterie!

by Maggie Cimarolli

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Over the past few years, the popularity of charcuterie boards has expanded from restaurant appetizers to holiday get-togethers and everything in between. The infinitely customizable assortment of meats, cheeses, fruits, breads and spreads can add a pop of color and flavor to your table and provide many options for your family and guests. Do not be intimidated by this sometimes, difficult to pronounce word; there is no set recipe, which makes for a creative project each time!

What is Charcuterie?

Charcuterie is a French term for the art of preparing and assembling cured meat and meat products. Charcuterie-style meat and cheese boards have become very popular outside of France, and this concept has evolved to include many foods besides meat, along with a variety of presentation variations and ingredient themes. Charcuterie cones, skewers, jarcuterie (layered in a small mason jar) and dessert boards (although not technically charcuterie) are a few examples of this expanding trend.

Cheese Please!

Everyone knows cheese is the main event! “Not only does cheese pair well with all food groups, it is also an incredibly nutrient-rich food and a great source of protein and calcium,” states Maggie Cimarolli, registered dietitian with St. Louis District Dairy Council. Select two to four types of cheeses to get started, depending on the size of the board. Soft ripened cheese like Brie or Camembert, semi-hard cheese like Gouda or cheddar and unique flavored cheese like blue or marinated feta are options that provide a mixture of flavors and textures.

Tips for the Perfect Board

Prepare a charcuterie board with a collection of foods from different categories. This ensures a wide variety of textures, flavors and colors to choose from, and makes it appealing to the eye as well. Here are suggested selections to include in the perfect board:

Cheese: Opt for a variety of textures, colors and shapes. Pre-slice for ease of serving and allow cheese to sit out to room temperature for enhanced flavor. Soft cheeses can be served in a small dish with a cheese knife.

Meat: Popular meat options are salami, prosciutto, pepperoni and ham. Roll or fold meats and stack.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables: Grapes, apples, berries and dried fruits such as apricots and cherries are popular fruit choices. Cherry tomatoes, sliced cucumbers and radishes provide additional color and texture.

Bread and Crunch: Sliced baguette, crackers, pita chips, pretzel chips and nuts are all great options. Placing them in small bowls or plates on the side will save room on the board, if needed.

Extras: Complete the board with extra elements that add unique flavors. Examples include jams or preserves, olives, hummus, salted butter, pickled vegetables, dips and honey.

For more information on dairy's health benefits or to download the "Cheese Pairing Guide", visit www.stldairycouncil.org or contact Maggie Cimarolli with St. Louis District Dairy Council: call 314-835-9668 or e-mail mcimarolli@stldairycouncil.org. For delicious and nutritious recipes, check us out on Facebook and Instagram at [STLDairyCouncil](#).