Cheese, like wine, is produced in a variety of styles. From fresh and creamy to aged and crumbly, there’s a cheese for every wine and everyone. With so many flavors, shapes and textures, it’s important to understand the basics of cheese in order to help navigate your way to discovering your favorites.

**KNOW YOUR CHEESE**

**FRESH CHEESE**
Fresh cheeses are usually white, soft and spreadable without a rind. They are made without any fermentation, mold or preservatives.
Mascarpone, Ricotta, Chevre, Feta, Cream Cheese, Cottage Cheese

**SOFT/BLOOMY RIND CHEESE**
Cheeses with a soft, creamy or almost runny texture, sometimes with a white, soft and slightly fuzzy ‘bloomy’ rind. These cheeses ripen from the outside in and usually have extra cream added to boost the fat content for richer taste.
Brie, Camembert, Goat, La Tur, Brillat Savarin, Ricotta Salata

**SEMI-SOFT CHEESE**
Uncooked pressed cheeses that are dense, smooth and generally creamy with little to no rind. Usually high in moisture content, these cheeses range from very mild to very pungent in flavor.
Colby, Fontina, Havarti, Monterey Jack, Muenster, Provolone

**FIRM/HARD CHEESE**
Cheeses that are cooked and/or pressed, with or without rinds, with as much liquid expelled from them as possible. Can be aged 1-2 years, even up to 6 years, such as aged Gouda.
Gouda, Cheddar, Dry Jack, Swiss, Parmesan

**BLUE CHEESE**
Cheeses inoculated with bacteria or penicillin, creating blue/green veining throughout resulting in intense, unique flavors.
Gorgonzola, Roquefort, Stilton, Cabrales, Cambazola

**WASH-RIND CHEESE**
Cheeses that are treated or cured by being brushed, rubbed, washed or immersed in brine of salt, wine, beer or grape brandy to add a unique flavor to the cheese.
Gruyère, Gouda, Munster, Asiago, Manchego, Provolone, Roquefort

**TYPES OF DAIRY**

**BUFFALO’S MILK**
Produces largest volume of milk per animal. Some believe buffalo’s milk to be the best flavor and quality dairy for making cheeses.
Buffalo Mozzarella, Gorgonzola, Parmesan

**COW’S MILK**
Cows have the highest production of milk. It generally takes 10 lbs of cow’s milk to make one pound of cheese, perfect for ‘big wheel’ cheeses.
Gouda, Cheddar, Brie, Camembert, Stilton, Comtè

**GOAT’S MILK**
Goats produce about half as much dairy as cows. With less lactose, goat’s milk has a mild and tangy flavor, perfect for specialty and aged cheeses.
Chevre, Bijou, Coupole, Crottin, Brie, Gouda

**SHEEP’S MILK**
Sheep produce about half as much dairy as goats. With more fat and protein than cow’s milk, sheep’s milk has a very concentrated flavor.
Manchego, Roquefort, Dante, Feta, Ricotta

**RAW VS. PASTEURIZED**

**RAW**
Comes directly from the animal with no treatment and never heated above 102°F.

**PASTEURIZED**
Heat treated milk which kills bad bacteria.

“The breed of the animal and their diet play a huge part in the flavor of their milk.”
- The Cheese Board
BUYING AND STORING YOUR CHEESE

**DO**
Only buy cheese that you will eat within 7-10 days so that it will stay fresh and provide optimal flavor. Buy from a shop that offers cut to order cheese to ensure that you get exactly what you need.

**DO**
Enjoy your cheese within a week of breaking the rind. Once you cut into your cheese, the quality will begin to decline.

**DO**
Store your cheeses in the vegetable drawer where the temperature is cold and stable.

**DO**
Store your cheeses at 35º - 45º fahrenheit to keep it at its best for the longest period of time.

**DON’T**
Store blue cheeses with other cheeses as the mold can transfer to the other cheeses.

**DO**
Use a fresh piece of plastic wrap or wax paper to rewrap hard cheeses after each use to prevent the spread of bacteria and rapid ripening. Stays fresh for up to two weeks if stored properly.

**DON’T**
Wrap the cheese too tight, which can leave the aroma/taste of plastic, or too loose, which can dry out the cheese.

**DO**
Wrap blue cheeses in foil. It needs a little oxygen to flow in and out to breathe and stay fresh. Too much oxygen will make it taste sour and bitter.

**DON’T**
Keep cheese past its prime. Look for signs of distorted coloring, foul aroma, altered texture and abnormally bitter taste to decide when it’s time to throw out your cheese.

**CHEESE AS IT AGES**

**UNDERSTANDING MOISTURE**

The aging of cheese is often dictated by the type and moisture content of the cheese. Cheese loses moisture as it ages causing the flavors to concentrate and the texture to change. Fresh cheeses do not age well because there is too much moisture in them to begin with.

**SOFT CHEESES**

As soft cheeses age, the paste is broken down, allowing it to soften and gain complexity. Too much aging will result in mold on the rind which releases ammonia, making the cheese bitter. Wash-rind and bloomy-rinded cheeses age from the outside in.

**FIRM/HARD CHEESES**

Moisture evaporates as hard cheeses age, resulting in more complex, concentrated flavors. As the cheese ages, the outer layer crystalizes, altering the overall texture of the cheese.

**BLUE CHEESES**

Blue cheeses age from the inside out. Aging intensifies the blue-moldy flavor and causes it to lose moisture, resulting in the change from a creamy to a more crumbly texture.

“Cheese is a living and breathing food that is constantly evolving and changing.”

- Jill Giacomini Basch, Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company

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Tasting cheese doesn’t have to be a formal or intimidating experience, instead, have fun expanding your horizons with new and exciting flavors. No two cheeses taste alike, so take the time to get to know your cheese with these simple and easy tips:

**TASTING YOUR CHEESE**

**LOOK AT THE CHEESE**
Begin your tasting experience by getting to know your cheese.
*How does the cheese look? Is the rind healthy? Is the interior color right?*

**SMELL THE CHEESE**
The aromas of the cheese should be consistent with the flavors.
*What do the aromas smell like? Try to describe the aromas you note before you put it in your mouth.*

**TASTE AND TEXTURE**
Tasting cheese is like tasting wine. Pay attention to the texture, the mouthfeel, the flavors and the finish.
*How does it feel on the tongue? Smooth, grainy, creamy, crumbly? How does it taste? Is it tart or tangy, sharp or mellow? Is it salty enough, or too salty?*

Utilize these key words to describe the taste palate of your favorite cheeses:
Grassy, Pungent, Earthy, Citric, Sweet, Gamey, Lactic, Lingering, Sharp, Lemony, Buttery, Nutty, Herbaceous, Toasty, Spicy

**EXPERIENCE THE FLAVOR**
Allow yourself to experience the entire flavor curve, from initial taste to finish. Be patient as you may not experience the full flavor until 30 seconds after first taste.
*How does it finish? Is it long-lasting, like a fine wine? Is it balanced?*

**TIPS FOR TASTING**

**TASTE THE STRENGTH**
Taste your cheeses in order of strength, starting with the most mild flavors and working your way up to the bold and intense cheeses.

**FROM THE INSIDE OUT**
The true base flavor of the cheese is on the inside, while the exterior displays more concentrated flavors that are affected by various outside elements.

**CLEANSE THE PALATE**
Cleanse the palate after tasting each cheese with sorbet, bread, apple slices or pickles. Tart or citrus flavors, such as pineapple or grapefruit will also work.

**TO RIND OR NOT TO RIND**
*Eating the rind can be part of the experience and overall enjoyment of the cheese. If you don’t like it, don’t eat it. That said, don’t ever eat the wax.*
* - The Cheese Board

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MAKE FRIENDS WITH YOUR CHEESEMONGER

Your cheesemonger handles cheese every day, so they have first-hand knowledge of which cheeses are tasting best and what's new to the case or particularly rare or exciting. Here are a few tips to utilizing your monger:

WHAT’S FRESH
Ask your merchant for their personal recommendations or preferences. What cheeses are in great condition that day? Which cheeses do they want to take home? What are they excited about?

PROVIDE THE DETAILS
Provide details on when and how you will be utilizing your cheese. Will you be serving it with other food, with wine, by itself? More information = Better results.

TASTE TEST
Sample the cheese together to confirm that it’s what you are looking for.

SCRAPED IT
Ask your monger to scrape the cheese for you. Scraping ensures the proper cut and scraping of any edges that may have been tainted by the surrounding foil, plastic wrap, etc.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

JANET FLETCHER
Janet Fletcher is a Napa Valley food writer and the author/co-author of more than 2 dozen books on food and beverage, including Cheese & Wine, Cheese & Beer and The Cheese Course. She is also the publisher of the weekly eNewsletter Planet Cheese sharing their extensive knowledge of cheese with us!

Family-owned and operated, Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company started as a dairy farm, later expanding into the creamery business. Starting with their signature blue cheese, the brand now makes a variety of cheeses in addition to cheesemaking classes and trade education classes. A special thank you to Jill Giacomini Basch for her insightful expertise on the wonderful and tasty world of cheeses!

Since the early 1990s, Cowgirl Creamery has worked to reflect the bounty of Marin County, and support the viability of local agriculture with their artisan cheese selection. Two decades later, with dozens of awards, two creameries, four retail stores and more than 200 cheeses to choose from, Cowgirl Creamery has become a well-loved San Francisco landmark.

Worker-owned since 1971, The Cheese Board Collective has evolved from a husband and wife shop to a well-respected store front. With almost 400 different cheeses to choose from, both domestic and international, they source from both artisan cheesemakers as well as well-known cheese distributors. A special thank you to Omri Avraham and Chutharat Sae-Tong for sharing their extensive knowledge of cheese with us!