

Tips for Pairing Cheeses with Beer - from Artisanal Premium Cheese

Think about Balance -- Pay attention to balance -- try to avoid a situation where one taste overpowers the other. Many high-gravity or especially bitter beers, such as IPA's, are liable to walk all over a more delicate cheese such as a fresh, young Loire valley chèvre. At the same time, a pungent washed-rind cheese could destroy the delicate, floral nature of a true German Pilsner.

Think about Texture -- Texture is another key area to watch your balance. Richer cheeses succeed when paired with more effervescent beers. Conversely, beer with density and substantial mouth-feel might not be the best pair for a triple-crème.

Think about Terroir -- While no guarantee for a winning pair, matching beer with cheese produced in the same locale can yield fascinating combinations. This has long been the sommelier's strategy for putting together wine and cheese, and the idea extends to beer as well. For example, pairing Montgomery's Cheddar with a big, British Bitter not only augments the flavor of both cheese and beer; it maintains the precise taste of the Somerset.

Think about Accompaniments -- It seems like common sense that similar-tasting foods go well together; indeed, complementary tastes really have the potential to elevate your sensory experience. A favorite pairings is the goat's milk cheese Hoja Santa with Saison Dupont, a Saison-style Belgian farmhouse ale. The spicy, floral, fruity colors of Saison Dupont are a perfect match for the saffras and anise overtones in the Hoja Santa -- together, the two add up to much more than the sum of its parts.

Think about Contrast -- On the other hand, Hoja Santa is also a remarkable pairing for Heavyweight Brewing Company's Perkuno's Hammer Porter, a very heavy, rich, dark, and bitter beer from New Jersey. Whereas the Hammer paired with a heavy or rich cheese might be too overwhelming, the light and spicy Hoja Santa revealed a side of the beer that we hadn't seen before.

Recommended Pairings: Cabecou Feuille with Pilsner: Is it surprising that the creamy, peppery Cabecou Feuille is a fantastic match for a Pilsner? A great Pilsner exhibits a clean, balanced body and floral overtones; the Cabecou's beautiful, creamy texture and black pepper spice fits like a glove.

Epoisses with India Pale Ale (IPA): It takes a big cheese to stand up to a big beer and a pungent, washed-rind beauty like Epoisses to combat a super-hopped, high-gravity IPA like Dogfish Head's. Pure delight!

Beermat with Wheat Beer: Wheat beers are full of high notes, so pair those beers that can balance that treble with bass. To that end, match those Soprano Weizens with the deeper-flavored Basso Profundo cow cheeses such as the Beermat, which happens to be bathed in Wheat Beer.

Amarelo da Beira Baixa with Lambic Ale: Lambic beers are spontaneously fermented, unpredictable, and often quite sour; brewers will add fresh fruit to offset the taste. Pair your Lambic with this mildly sweet, fairly goat-y British blue cheese...sometimes!