

Mediterranean Cheeses

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THE SAN DIEGO CHEESE CLUB

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Outline

- Introduction
- Mediterranean Region and Countries
- Factors that Influence Cheeses
- Varieties of Mediterranean Cheeses
- Recipes and Tips
- Resources for More Information

Introduction

- Mediterranean sea links 3 continents and touches over 20 countries
- A region rich in cheesemaking history
- Many small countries
- Not focusing on Spain, France, Italy
 - They have their own distinct cheese cultures
- Primarily fresh or brined farmhouse styles
- Many are conducive to making at home

Mediterranean Region and Countries



Factors that Influence Cheeses

- Geography
 - Rocky Terrain
 - Fairly infertile
- Sheep and goats, some water buffalo
 - Fewer cows
- Small family farms
 - Much focus on cheeses that can be easily made at home and on the farm
- Limited Export

Cheese Varieties: Categories

- Feta
- Yogurt Cheeses
- Spiced Cheeses
- String Cheeses
- Grilling Cheeses
- Other Cheeses

Cheese Varieties: Feta

- Quintessential Mediterranean
- Greek for “Sliced”
- Crumbly, salty brined cheese
- White in color
- Fresh cheese that is brined to preserve
- Traditionally aged in barrels of brine



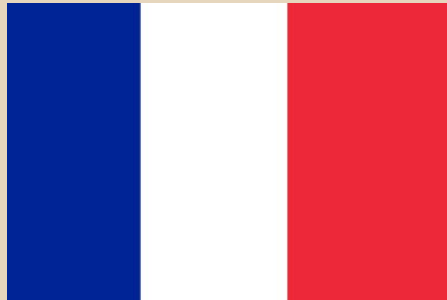
Cheese Varieties: Feta (2)

- Typically Sheep or Sheep+Goat Milk
- Acid-coagulated
- Brined
- Greek, made in other areas too
- French feta because of Roquefort region restriction



Cheese Samples: Feta - Comparison

- Try 3 styles to compare
- Common Varieties
 - Greek - the classic - briny, sharp, firmer
 - French - mild, richer, more creamy, less briney
 - Bulgarian - salty, tangy, firm yet creamy



Cheese Varieties: Yogurt Cheeses

- Made from drained yogurt
 - Drained more than greek yogurt
- Labneh is the most widely known
- Laban is less strained version
- Easily made from homemade or commercial yogurt



Cheese Varieties: Spiced Cheeses

- Nigella, AKA Black Cardamom
 - String cheese and Nabulsi
- Mahleb
 - Ground pits of Mahaleb cherry
 - Mix of almond/cherry flavors
 - String cheese
- Za'atar Spice Mix
 - Thyme, oregano, marjoram, etc.
 - Shanklish and spiced labneh
- Mint
 - Halloumi



Cheese Sample: Shanklish

- Shanklish in Oil
 - Water Buffalo Milk
 - Small balls of cheese rolled in spices
 - Sold oil-packed in a jar
 - Also available in other shapes not packed in oil
 - Traditionally from Syria and Lebanon



Cheese Varieties: String Cheeses

- Pasta Filata (Stretched Curd) cheeses
- Similar to mozzarella
- Often braided or flavored
 - Black caraway common
 - Can be smoked
- Types
 - “String Cheese”
 - Majdoule

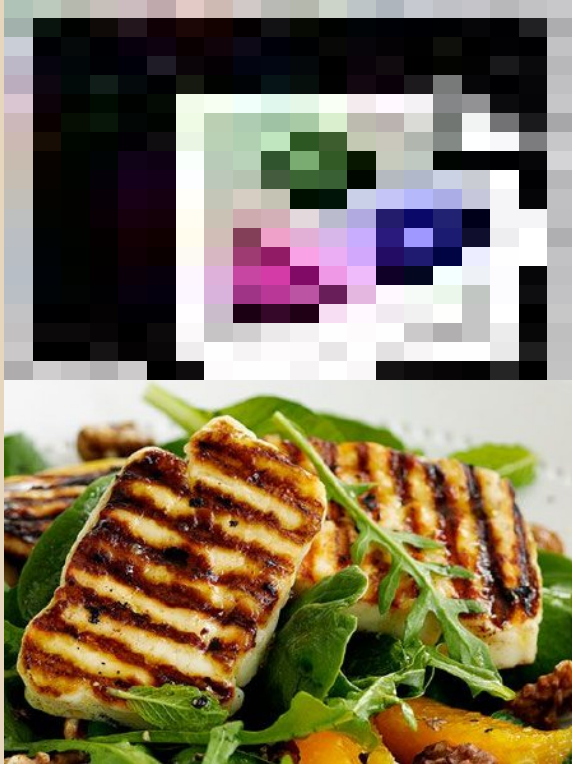


Cheese Sample: String Cheese

- String cheese with nigella seeds
- Cow Milk
- Comes in characteristic braided format



Cheese Varieties: “Grilling” Cheeses



- Halloumi is most known
 - Flavored with mint
- Coagulated with rennet and NO acid or bacteria
- Does not melt when heated
 - Great for grilling / frying
- Formed curd is heated in hot whey
- Can still be eaten uncooked

Cheese Sample: Halloumi

- From Cyprus
- Sheep Milk
- Flavored with mint
- Squeaks when you chew it



Cheese Varieties: Other

- Ackawi - White, firm, brined - Israel
- Kashkaval - Yellow, firm - Various
- Testouri - Orange-shaped - Egypt
- Jibneh Arabieh - mild, firm - Egypt and others
- Basket Cheese - formed in a basket, fresh or dry - Various
- Beyaz Peynir - white, brined, unpasteurized; similar to feta - Turkey

Cheese Sample: Ackawi



- Cow Milk (Most common)
 - Can also be made from cow or sheep milk
- Originates from Acre, Israel
- White firm brined cheese, smooth texture, mildly salty
- When supplies have been low, people soak feta in water to simulate

Cheese Sample: Kashkaval

- Sheep Milk
- Firm yellow cheese common to multiple countries
- Sheep milk is common, but also goat or cow.



Recipes and Tips: Overview

- Yogurt Cheese Recipe
- Mediterranean String Cheese Tips
- Mediterranean String Cheese Recipe
- Feta Tips

Recipe: Labneh (Yogurt Cheese)

1. Heat $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of milk to 110F
2. Mix in about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of yogurt with active cultures
3. Maintain temperature as well as you can overnight
 - a. I use a $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon thermos
4. Mix in $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp salt, or to taste
5. Drain in cheesecloth for at least several hours or until desired thickness
6. Optionally, roll into balls, add spices, and/or preserve in oil

Mediterranean String Cheese - Tips

- Mozzarella with a mediterranean flair
- Often has nigella seeds and mahleb
- Ricki Carrol's "30 Minute Mozzarella" recipe works great
- Stretch a bit more than mozzarella
- Mix in salt, seeds, and spices when almost melted

Recipe: Mediterranean String Cheese

- 1 gallon whole milk (not Ultra Pasteurized)
- ¼ tsp calcium chloride
- ¼ tsp lipase (optional)
- 1 ½ tsp citric acid
- ¼ tsp liquid rennet
- 1 tsp cheese salt
- 2 tsp nigella seeds
- ½ tsp mahleb (optional)



Recipe: Mediterranean String Cheese

1. To cool milk add: lipase, calcium chloride, and citric acid (diluted in water)
2. Slowly warm milk to 90F
3. Mix in rennet (diluted in water) and stir gently for about 20 strokes
4. Let rest for 5 minutes to form curd
5. Cut curd into 1" cubes
6. Heat slowly to 105F while stirring gently
7. Remove from heat and stir gently 2-5 minutes
8. Drain in colander



Recipe: Mediterranean String Cheese

9. In microwave safe bowl, heat on high for 1 minute
10. Mix curds by hand, folding to mix
11. Heat another 30 seconds and mix again
12. Mix in salt and any desired spices (nigella, mahleb) by folding over curds
13. Heat a bit more if needed to get stretchy curd resembling a thin dough
14. Stretch and fold over about a dozen times
15. Make a hole in the middle and twist to form a braid



Feta - Tips For Making

- Feta is made as a basic semi-firm cheese, but is not typically pressed
- Traditionally brined, but can be salted
- Use calcium chloride in brine to keep cheese intact
- Lipase can be used to add more intense flavor to milder milks

Resources for More Information

- Cheese Primer (Steven Jenkins)
 - Balkan Cheeses Chapter
- Home Cheese Making (Ricki Carroll)
 - Mozzarella, feta, and yogurt recipes
- Chefindisguise.com blog
 - [Armenian String Cheese Recipe](#)
- North Park Produce (for buying cheeses)
 - Locations in North Park, Vista, Poway, El Cajon

Questions?

