

10 pieces of advice for choosing cheese

1. FOLLOW THE ADVICE OF AN EXPERT

Throughout the world, cheesemakers and cheesemasters devote their lives to cheese. They know them, love them, age them themselves, and scrupulously verify their origin and fabrication. Being an expert is something that cannot be improvised, so to discover the secrets of these genuine master artists, don't hesitate to follow their advice.

2. RESPECT THE SEASONS

Yes, certain cheeses are seasonal. But here we are talking about **periods of excellence** ; yet a good number of cheeses are produced all the year long, and are not any less delectable ! For other cheeses it is better to enjoy them at the right moment, when their qualities and authenticity can be fully expressed.

In general, the season of consumption does not correspond to the season of production because of the aging period required after production. The reserve cheeses, those refined over the course of several months, are enjoyable all year long.

A small guide to the seasons :

In the winter, the moisture, absence of fresh pastures, and severe climate affect the quality of milk produced by the animals : it's less rich and characteristic. As a result, the cheeses are far from their optimal taste. A cheese lover will tend to prefer cheeses produced during the previous spring and autumn because the lengthy aging period brings them to their peak of taste and maturity. These are generally pressed cheeses.

Spring is the season of splendor for cheese, which will be at its best the following summer. Sun and fresh grass come together to produce a milk that is rich in new aromas...Even better, it's the season for goat cheese : don't miss it !

In the summer, cheese, nourished by the freshness and renewal of spring, arrives at its full maturity. This is the time to taste the best Camembert, St. Nectaire, and, generally speaking, the soft cheeses.

In the autumn, after the summer's dryness, there is a renewal of the pastures : the blue cheeses keep their flavors, the goat cheeses regain their strength, and the soft cheeses endure.

3. BE CAREFUL OF “INDUSTRIAL” CHEESES

These “dressed up” cheeses, pure inventions of the dairy industry, usually come from pasteurized milk and have a standardized taste...

Those who want authentic cheese should look for the following indications : “lait cru” (unpasteurized milk), “fermier” (from the farm), and “A.O.C” (Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée, or registered trademark of origin).

4. BE ASSURED OF THE CHEESE’S ORIGIN

A label of “unpasteurized milk” is the only mark of a genuine regional cheese : this is what guarantees its authenticity. Let’s be clear : a true Camembert can only come from Normandy, from the milk of cows of that region.

5. DARE TO PUT ASIDE YOUR HABITS AND PRECONCEIVED IDEAS

Put confidence in your local cheese specialist, he knows which cheese is at its prime. Describe what you would like in terms of texture and taste, and discuss the following with him : the day, the occasion, and the food that will accompany the cheese. All of this information is valuable in receiving good advice, and you’ll find that the opportunities to try new delights are endless.

6. CHERISH THE IRREGULAR CHARACTERISTICS OF TRADITIONAL CHEESES

A less attractive crust could be hiding a jewel !

7. FAVOR TASTE OVER APPEARANCE

Don’t hesitate to sample : a taste is worth more than 1000 words...

8. AVOID STOCKING UP

Home storage conditions are often unsuitable, and cheese loses its suppleness, aroma, and identity here. By frequently buying smaller amounts, you will ensure yourself that cheese is flavorful and in good condition...

9. WHILE IN THE STORE, TAKE IN...

...its history, location, cleanliness, and the arrangement of its cheeses. Enjoy its atmosphere and the range of choices... Allow yourself to be guided by a team with a passion for taste...

10. FINALLY... MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CHEESE

Whether a novice, amateur, or expert, learn to make cheese a privileged part of your meal : honor it with the appropriate wine, some authentic bread, good conversation, and... enjoy !