

BRIE CHEESE

Brie is one of the best known and most widely consumed cheeses in the world, and is considered a benchmark for the category of soft-ripened cheeses. No longer relegated exclusively to the cheese board, however, Brie is making itself known as part of the everyday casual dining scene, either by itself or as an ingredient, such as sliced in a panini, melted atop a hamburger, or cut up for salads as it is on the party buffet. In fact, the addition of Brie to your favorite recipes can transform any occasion into something special and pleasurable. Whether it is served to end a four-star meal or as part of a summertime picnic, this distinctive cheese with its downy-white mold and earthy flavor continues to be an American favorite.

● Isn't Brie high in fat?

The fat percentage listed on a cheese is actually based on the amount of solids, not the entire weight. This is a big difference because the softer and fresher a cheese is, the higher the water content, which means it's lower in fat. Brie, with up to 50 percent water content, is actually lower in fat and calories per ounce than hard cheeses such as cheddar. In other words, if Brie is labeled as 60 percent fat, it works out to be only 30 percent of the entire cheese. In general, Brie is a healthy food choice that is lower in fat than most cheeses.

● Can I eat the rind?

In France, most connoisseurs enjoy the rind for the more complex flavors it adds to the cheese, while many American cheese lovers still shy away from it. Whatever your choice, be assured that the rind is 100 percent natural and perfectly edible.

● What about freshness?

Brie is fairly simple to assess. It should have an overall clean, fresh look, and ripe Brie should be rather plump and soft to the touch. Avoid Brie that smells strongly of ammonia or is sagging as though it's deflated. These are signs that the cheese is too old or has not been stored properly. It is quite normal for Brie to develop off-white highlights in the mold, but should not be grossly discolored.

● Does the milk make a difference?

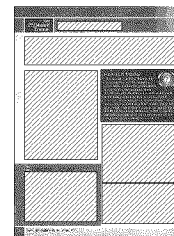
Yes, the richer the milk, the creamier the cheese. That's why grass-fed animals make better Brie. That is why Brie from France — where the tradition of grass feeding prevails — is so much creamier. A good way to tell is by the color of the paste, which should be a buttery (yellow) hue. An exception is Brie from grass-fed goat's milk, which should have a shiny, white paste, a tangy flavor, and all the creaminess Brie connoisseurs seek.

● What is the best way to serve Brie?

Unwrap your Brie and bring it to room temperature an hour before serving. If serving a whole wheel, slice it in wedges like a cake and then slice individual servings diagonally to avoid leaving nothing but rind for the next unlucky guest.

● What are the best food and wine pairings?

Brie pairs beautifully with the tart taste of dried cranberries,



fresh apples or fig chutney. Its distinctive creamy texture contrasts perfectly with crunchy walnuts or toasted almonds. In addition to the uses described above, there are many easy and delicious recipes for Brie available on the Internet, offering a step-up to traditional dishes. From Champagne to hearty reds, to beer and cider, Brie pairs with a wide assortment of fine wines and cocktails.

● **How do I store Brie?**

Buy only as much Brie as you will consume for up to two weeks. Once opened, Brie should be kept tightly wrapped in plastic wrap and is best kept in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator. Brie should never be frozen.

- Brie is named for a market town in the Ile de France region, located in north-central France, which also includes the capital city of Paris.
- The cheese first gained fame as a result of its fortunate proximity to Paris, an important city since Roman times, and the city of Reims in the adjacent region of Champagne, the traditional site of the coronation of the French kings.
- Brie is thought to date back as far as the fifth century. It is believed that Charlemagne praised the cheese as early as 774.
- In the days before the reliable transportation of cheese from other regions, Brie's fame benefited from being produced virtually right outside the city gates of Paris.