

Chef culture

COOK *with* CHEESE PRO-STYLE

Is there a more crowd-pleasing food than cheese? Little kids eat it, adults indulge in it, and chefs love to use this highly versatile ingredient. Varying textures, aromas, and flavors let cheese cozy up to grains and breads as well as to proteins and vegetables. The creaminess of fresh goat cheese can round off the edges of earthy beets or piquant garlic scapes, or full-flavored pecorino can amp up the flavor of a classic gratin. Cheese can be firm, melty, or crisp; it can be mellow and creamy, or assertive and pungent.

The recipes below are from chefs who delight in showing off cheeses in all their glorious guises. Even though these are four-star recipes, advanced techniques and expensive equipment are not required. These are simple dishes with a sophisticated edge, perfect for both weeknight dinners and casual entertaining. There's something for those days when green, vibrant produce is just starting to show up in the markets and warm, comforting dishes for when the winter winds still blow. So do as the chefs do, and make an impact with cheese. It makes everything just a little bit tastier.

FRENCH GOAT CHEESE and VEGETABLE TERRINE EXECUTIVE CHEF PHIL CONLON SWINE, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

Not only is this a beautiful and colorful dish, the vegetables can be cooked two to three days ahead of time before assembling the terrine. Also, preparing the terrine a few days ahead will make it easier to slice. Once it's sliced, wrap the remaining portion in plastic wrap, and it will keep for up to a week.

MAKES ABOUT 10 SERVINGS

4 red peppers
4 yellow peppers
3 tablespoons olive oil
Salt, to taste
Black pepper, to taste
2 medium zucchini
2 medium yellow squash
1½ pounds fresh French goat cheese at room temperature (such as President, Soignon, Jacquin)

▶ Heat oven to 375°F. Toss the whole peppers with 2 tablespoons olive oil and salt and pepper to taste. Place on a baking pan, and roast until charred on the outside. Put the peppers immediately into a paper bag or a heatproof, airtight container to cool.

▶ Slice zucchini and squash lengthwise into ½-inch slices. Lay slices on a sheet pan lined with parchment paper, drizzle with about a tablespoon of olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Roast until just tender, 5 to 10 minutes. Set aside to cool down to room temperature.

▶ In the meantime peel the skins off the roasted peppers, and discard the seeds and the stalks. Cut the peppers into long, wide strips, about five strips per pepper.

▶ Place a sheet of plastic wrap double the size of a 10- by 6-inch loaf pan on a work surface. Place goat cheese in the center of the sheet, and cover with another piece of plastic wrap, the same size as the first. With your palms flatten and shape

the goat cheese to approximately the size of the loaf pan. Remove the top piece of plastic wrap, and season the cheese with salt and pepper, then wrap again, and refrigerate until firm.

▶ Line the loaf pan with plastic wrap, leaving a 2- to 4-inch overhang on the 10-inch sides. Lay slices of the yellow peppers in the bottom of the loaf pan, making sure the slices overlap slightly. Repeat with zucchini slices, making sure they overlap both lengthwise and widthwise in the pan. Top with the goat cheese, then with the yellow squash, and finally with the red peppers.

▶ Place another sheet of plastic wrap on top of the loaf pan to cover, making sure it is flush with the final red pepper layer. Roll out a piece of aluminum foil three times the size of the top of the loaf pan, and fold three times to create a thick aluminum foil cover. Place heavy items such as bottles, jars, or cans evenly on top of the aluminum foil to weigh down the terrine. Refrigerate the loaf pan, along with weights, for 4 to 6 hours.

▶ To serve remove the weights and flip the loaf pan onto a cutting board. Wiggle the pan and tap it with the back of the knife to release terrine from the pan. With a sharp knife cut the terrine into 1-inch-thick slices, and serve with a salad of mixed greens.



BEET SALAD *with* FRENCH GOAT CHEESE BLINTZES

CHEF CENOBIO CANALIZO

MICHAEL JORDAN'S THE STEAKHOUSE N.Y.C., NEW YORK

The combination of beets and goat cheese is augmented by the addition of a crisp blintz.

SERVES 4

4 ounces creamy French goat cheese
8 medium beets, assorted colors,
leafy greens removed
1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
Salt, to taste
Black pepper, to taste
4 sheets phyllo dough, thawed
1 egg
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for sautéing
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1 teaspoon fresh chives, finely minced
Small handful lamb's lettuce

▶ Take the goat cheese out of the refrigerator, and bring to room temperature. Boil the beets in salted water for 45 minutes. Drain, rub off skins with a towel, and set aside.

▶ Mix the goat cheese with the rosemary, thyme, salt, and pepper to taste.

▶ While the beets are cooling, lay out the phyllo dough (make sure to keep it covered until you are ready to work with it). In a small bowl whisk the egg, and brush it on the pastry. Place about 2½ tablespoons of the cheese mixture in the middle of a pastry piece. Fold pastry around the cheese, creating a small packet. Repeat with the remaining phyllo sheets. Sauté in olive oil until golden brown and crisp, about 1 minute per side. The cheese should be soft and warm but not completely melted.

▶ Quarter the beets, and season with salt and pepper. Whisk 2 tablespoons olive oil, red wine vinegar, and chives to make the vinaigrette. Toss the beets with the vinaigrette. Lean the crisp blintzes against the beets and garnish with lamb's lettuce. Serve immediately.