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Discovering  
The Delicacy of  
**French  
Goat Cheeses**

Five Spectacular Summer Recipes

STORY BY LIZ THORPE    PHOTOS BY GEERT TEUWEN





**A**S THE COLD, HARSH WEATHER COMES TO AN END, we begin to crave soft, light, delicate things.

For this I look no further than French goat cheeses. I can't say there's any scientific proof of the sunshine in cheeses like Chabichou du Poitou or Valençay, but when I close my eyes, I swear I taste it — a suitable match for the green shoots and juicy berries we've waited so very long to see again.

After months of tubers and roots, green vegetables are a necessity. A crowd-friendly snack demands little more than a quick chop and sauté of spring leeks before blending with lush, spreadable Chèvre. The lemony thick cheese tempers flecks of chives and makes a simple and instantaneous dip for radishes and crunchy buttercup lettuce.

Spring brings thin, snappy stalks of asparagus that require little to no fussing. Atop flatbread with a tangle of spring onions and baby potatoes, asparagus is the deep vegetal counterpoint to Chabichou du Poitou, a more earthen French goat cheese with clay-like texture and lingering minerality. The rind is developed using the yeast *geotrichum*, which gives a wrinkled brainy appearance and a nutty flavor profile.

Shaved and tossed with intense, peppery radishes, asparagus cools and soothes, bolstered by thin sheaves of Valençay. The famous Valençay PDO can only be made with raw milk. However, a pasteurized version of this style is imported and retailers in the United States use the Valençay name for imported pasteurized versions. Like many of the classic goat cheeses of France's Loire Valley, it can be found in

a broad spectrum of ripeness. The freshest versions have a texture comparable to cheesecake, with a sprinkling of edible black ash. As they age, this ashing develops into a blue and grey mottled, mold-ripened skin. At any age, the silky interior tastes of fresh milk; however, riper versions offer more piquancy and goaty tang on the finish.

The versatility of French goat cheeses comes from their great range of styles and textures. In cooking, I appreciate their ability to complement other ingredients without overpowering them. While I nearly live on roasted chicken all winter, a spring variation has me adding buttery pats of French Goat Brie to pounded chicken cutlets. Rolled, baked and sliced, the chicken and melted Brie is placed atop spring greens and drizzled with mustard vinaigrette. The warm, nearly liquid cheese spills across the dish making a decadent dressing along with the vinaigrette.

For dessert, fresh French goat cheese logs are the perfect match for tiny new strawberries — showcasing the clean, tangy flavor of goat milk, fresh Chèvre gives a lift of acidity to accentuate strawberries' natural sugars. Blended with whipped cream it is layered with pound cake and macerated berries in a glorious trifle.

The beauty of spring produce is its freshness. Many of these first bites are delicate and best complemented by the light, yet vibrant notes of French goat cheeses. To explore and savor the possibilities of these spring ingredients, from crisp asparagus to perfectly plump strawberries, I can't think of a better companion than the enormous range of French goat cheeses, in their many shapes, flavors and textures. **CC**



## SHAVED SPRING VEGETABLE SALAD WITH VALENÇAY

Serves: 2 for a meal, 4 for appetizer/starter salad

- 6 oz asparagus, shaved, about 2 cups shaved
- 2 medium-sized radishes
- ½ tsp capers, drained and minced
- Fresh black pepper, to taste
- 1 Valençay

### Caper Parsley Vinaigrette

- 1 Tbsp caper juice
- 1 tsp honey
- 1 tsp parsley, minced
- 3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil

- Cut tops of the asparagus and reserve. Using a vegetable peeler, shave asparagus into long, thin noodle-like pieces directly into a medium bowl.

- Cut the top and bottom off the radishes, and thinly slice into the bowl with the asparagus. Toss with capers.

- In a small bowl, whisk together the caper juice, honey and parsley. Slowly drizzle in the olive oil, whisking until fully combined.

- Drizzle the vinaigrette over the asparagus salad and mix with tongs. Top with freshly cracked pepper.

- Cut 4, ¼-inch slices of Valençay.

- Lay 2 slices of the cheese next to each other on one side of the plate. Divide the salad evenly among the plates, piling next to cheese.

- Serve immediately.



## POTATO, ASPARAGUS AND SPRING ONION FLATBREAD WITH CHABICHOU DU POITOU

Makes 1 flatbread: serves 2 as a meal, 4 as an appetizer

- 8 oz store-bought pizza dough (approximately 1/2 - 1 lb pizza dough)
- Flour, enough to cover workspace
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 5-6 red or white baby potatoes, approximately 5 oz, thinly sliced
- 2 oz asparagus, roughly chopped into 1-inch pieces (1/2 cup)
- 1/4 cup thinly sliced spring onions \*
- 1 Chabichou du Poitou, thinly sliced
- Sea salt, to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Using a pizza stone, place in the oven now. If not, lightly grease a cookie sheet and set aside.

- Roll out the dough on a clean and floured workspace into a thin oval shape. Drizzle with olive oil.

- Place sliced potatoes on the flatbread, overlapping slightly to cover the dough. Scatter the asparagus on the flatbread and top with spring onions.

- Cook for 10 minutes, turning halfway through. Remove flatbread from oven, place Chabichou du Poitou slices on top, place back in oven and cook an additional 5 minutes. While still hot out of the oven, sprinkle with sea salt.

\*Scallions can be substituted



## CARAMELIZED LEEK AND CHIVE DIP WITH SPREADABLE FRENCH GOAT CHEESE

Makes 1  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups/serves 4

- 2 Tbsp butter
- 1 heaping cup leeks, thinly sliced
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chives, chopped
- 2 containers spreadable French goat cheese (10.6 oz total),  
such as: Soignon Chèvre à Tartiner or Chèvre moussé
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp coarse salt

- In a large pan over medium-low heat, sauté leeks in butter, stirring occasionally for about 8-10 minutes. Reducing the heat to low continue cooking, stirring often, until the leeks are golden brown, about another 10 minutes.

- In a medium bowl, combine leeks, chives, cheese and salt, mixing until fully incorporated. Refrigerate for at least 20 minutes before serving; can be made 1 day ahead.

- Serve with vegetables, chips, crackers, or crostini.



## FRENCH GOAT BRIE-STUFFED CHICKEN WITH SPRING GREENS

Serves 4

- 16 oz French goat Brie, such as Soignon Goat Brie, Florette or Chèvre d'Argental
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 6 cups mixed spring greens

### Mustard Vinaigrette

- 2 Tbsp mustard
- 2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
- Salt, pinch to taste
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- Pepper, to taste

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Remove the rind on all sides of the goat Brie. Slice evenly into quarters.
- Pound chicken breasts to ¼-inch thickness.
- Place goat Brie in the middle of each breast. Roll from the tip of the chicken breast up and secure with toothpicks.
- Place chicken on a rimmed baking sheet and cook 20-30 minutes, until chicken is cooked through. Set aside to cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove toothpicks and slice.
- In a small mixing bowl, whisk the

mustard, lemon juice and a pinch of salt. Slowly add the olive oil, whisking to combine.

- Place the spring greens in a large bowl and toss with mustard vinaigrette,

salt and pepper to taste.

- To serve, divide greens by 4 and place one sliced chicken breast on top of each.

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## STRAWBERRY AND FRESH FRENCH GOAT CHEESE TRIFLE

Serves 6-8

- 2 lbs strawberries
- 2 lemons, juiced (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup + 2 Tbsp)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup granulated sugar
- 1 tsp thyme leaves, minced
- 28-30 oz fresh French goat cheese (7, 4-oz logs; 3, 10-oz logs)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup honey
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 12 oz pound cake

- Quarter the strawberries lengthwise and add to a large bowl. Add lemon juice, sugar and thyme and mix until combined. Let sit and macerate for 30 minutes.

- Meanwhile, using a standing mixer with a paddle

attachment, whip the goat cheese and honey, on medium speed for 2 minutes. Transfer to a large bowl and set aside.

- Whip the heavy cream to firm peaks with the whisk attachment on a stand mixer or hand blender (about 1 minute).

- Mix a spoonful of the whipped cream into the goat cheese. Gently fold in the remaining whipped cream in 3 batches.

- After 30 minutes, separate the strawberry juice from the strawberries (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of juice total); reserve in a measuring cup for easy pouring.

- Cut pound cake into 12 even  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch slices.

- To Assemble: Layer the bottom of a 9-inch trifle dish with  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the pound cake, covering as much as possible.

- Drizzle half of the strawberry juice over the pound cake and top with about 2 cups of strawberries, spreading evenly.

- Pour half of the goat cheese mousse on top (about 2 cups) and repeat, ending with the goat cheese.

- Refrigerate until serving, up to 12 hours.