

Brush up on your cheese knowledge with a primer about the state that dominates.

CHEESE PLEASE

We're called cheeseheads for a reason. Sure, Wisconsin leads the nation in cheese production and hauls away so many medals at cheese competitions that it doesn't even look like a fair fight. But it goes beyond that. It's who we are. People in Wisconsin have their favorites and we'll earnestly debate the good or bad about crunch in a cheddar or if beer or wine make a

better pairing. We'll memorize what days the fresh curds are for sale. We'll welcome the meatless sacrifices of Lent because it's an excuse to eat more grilled cheese. None of this is by accident. Wisconsin was the first state to grade its cheese for quality. Wisconsin is the only state that requires cheese for retail sale to be made by licensed cheesemakers. Wisconsin is the only place

outside Europe with a master cheesemaker program with a growing list of 60. This guide is a primer to the cheeses that are the biggest part of the Wisconsin landscape, and even so are a sliver of what's made here. Specialty cheese makes up 21 percent of the state's production and creative artisans are bringing the state attention with award-winners and newsmakers such as Pleasant Ridge

Reserve, Hook's 15-Year Cheddar, Marieke Gouda and Evalon. This guide, full of pairing suggestions from the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, can build your Wisconsin cheese knowledge. And if you can't haul this page around with you everywhere, WMMB's "Wisconsin Cheese Cupid" website and app is available for free and comes in handy while shopping, www.cheesecupid.com.

The perfect pair

What to drink with your Wisconsin cheese.

	Red wines	White wines	Beer & cider	Hard liquor
	Beaujolais Cabernet Chianti Malbec Merlot Pinot Noir Port Rosé Syrah Tempranillo Zinfandel	Champagne Chardonnay Madeira Pinot Gris Riesling Sauvignon blanc Amber ale American pale lager Belgian ale Bock Brown ale Cider Fruit beer India Pale ale Pale ale Pilsner Porter Saison ale Scotch ale Sour ale Stout	Wheat ale Bourbon Brandy Rum Scotch	
Hard <i>Low moisture cheeses.</i>	Parmesan			
Semi-hard <i>Semi-hard or semi-soft cheeses generally have a smooth, creamy interior with little or no rind.</i>	Brick			
	Cheddar			
	Colby			
	Gouda			
	Swiss			
Soft <i>Not the same as a fresh cheese (such as a chevre) soft and semi-soft cheeses have a high moisture content and can be mild tasting.</i>	Blue			
	Limburger			
	Mozzarella			
	Muenster			

10 popular Wisconsin cheese styles

Blue



The cheese that is supposed to be moldy turns that way due to the introduction of mold during the make process. The result is flavor, color and a versatile cheese that can pair well with everything from meat to fruit and chocolate.

Flavor: Tangy, earthy and in some cases, creamy.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Carr Valley
- Roth Cheese
- Hook's Cheese Co.

Brick



Like Bucky Badger or bubblers, brick cheese is a Wisconsin original. It was created by Swiss immigrant John Jossi in 1877. It comes in the shape of a brick but also takes its name from the way it is traditionally made - using bricks to press out moisture from the cheese.

Flavor: Mild, sweet and nutty. It gets more pungent as it ages.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Forgotten Valley
- Klondike Cheese Co.
- Widmer's Cheese Cellars

Cheddar



The most ubiquitous cheese in the U.S. and in Wisconsin, but one that's moved way beyond the mass-produced burger-topper. It can be bandage-wrapped, cave-aged or even aged for 20 years. The color comes from annatto, a natural coloring.

Flavor: A young cheddar starts creamy, mild and nutty, and gets crumbly, sharper and even crunchy as it ages, thanks to the presence of calcium lactate crystals.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Bleu Mont Dairy
- Hook's Cheese Co.
- Maple Leaf Cheese

Colby



A Wisconsin original, created in Colby, Wisconsin in 1885. It's considered a cousin to cheddar but the make process varies slightly and also results in tiny holes. Colby often comes in a "Longhorn" cylinder that is cut into half moons.

Flavor: Sweet and mild, like a young cheddar.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Deer Creek
- Hook's Cheese Co.
- Widmer's Cheese Cellars

Gouda



A Dutch cheese named for the city of its origin, where it's pronounced closer to "how-da" than the "goo-da" pronunciation here. The cheese is aged from 2 months to 5 years and develops crystals like cheddars do. Its wax rind is inedible.

Flavor: A buttery, nutty cheese that becomes almost caramel-like as it ages.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Babcock Hall Dairy Plant
- Carr Valley Cheese Co.
- Holland's Family Cheese

Limburger



Famous for its smell, this "stinky cheese" is traditionally eaten with a slice of raw onion between two slices of dark rye bread. Chalet Cheese Cooperative in Monroe makes almost all the Limburger cheese sold in the U.S.

Flavor: The aroma belies the fact that Limburger is actually a somewhat mild cheese though it definitely has an earthy, mushroomy taste.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Chalet Cheese Cooperative

Mozzarella



It's the top-produced cheese in Wisconsin - just think of all those pizzas everywhere. Besides what goes on pizza, mozzarella is also turned into string cheese or made and served fresh and soft. It's a popular choice for home cooks to try their hand at cheese making.

Flavor: Salty, milky, mild.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Cedar Grove
- Cesare's Cheese
- Crave Brothers Farmstead

Muenster



Notable for its dark coating that comes from the natural dye annatto, it's a soft, mellow cheese not to be confused with the French Munster. It's been made in Wisconsin since the late 1800s and earned its 15 minutes of fame in 2013 when an Illinois man was accused of stealing 200,000 pounds of it.

Flavor: Mild and creamy.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Decatur Dairy
- Edelweiss Creamery
- Silver-Lewis Cooperative

Parmesan



This hard cheese of Italian origin is best known as an accompaniment to salads, pastas or soups but can also be a snacking cheese. In Europe, true Parmigiano Reggiano is strictly regulated in how it's made. In Wisconsin, cheese makers produce Parmesan known as American Grana.

Flavor: Nutty, sweet, buttery and it gets stronger as it ages.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- BelGioioso Cheese Inc.
- Hook's Cheese Co.
- Sartori Company

Swiss



United by holes, there is actually a great variety to Swiss cheese - cheeses from Switzerland and Swiss-style cheeses made here. Green County is a U.S. epicenter for Swiss, baby Swiss, sweet Swiss, Emmentaler and Gruyere-inspired cheese such as Roth's Gran Cru.

Flavor: Creamy, sweet, nutty and varies depending on the kind. Generally, the larger the holes, the stronger the flavor.

LOCAL FAVORITES

- Deppeler's
- Edelweiss Creamery
- Roth Cheese

NOTE: Local favorites suggested by Jane Burns; Jeanne Carpenter of Metcalfe's Market; and Ken Monteleone of Fromagination

- Cheese curds are growing in popularity. Data from market researcher IRI says retail sales grew 17.3 percent in 2015, and menu mentions were up 13 percent.
- 600 different varieties of cheese are made in Wisconsin, more than any other state or nation.
- Joe Widmer of Widmer's Cheese Cellars uses the same bricks his grandfather used to make brick cheese.
- The average American consumes 34 pounds of cheese annually, a growth of 43 percent over the past 25 years.
- The World Championship Cheese Contest is March 7-9 at Monona Terrace.
- Wisconsin ranks No. 1 in the U.S. in milking goats, with 44,000.
- Some cheese is aged in actual caves; other caves are man-made into the ground and some commercial "caves" are coolers with temperature and humidity adjusted for aging cheese.
- Cheese tastes best if it is set out at least a half hour before serving.
- Monroe High School's nickname, the Cheese-makers, might be unusual but it's not unique. Monroe also shares the name with a high school in Tillamook, Oregon, home of the well-known Tillamook Cheddar.