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FRENCH CHÈVRE FAVORITES





THE ULTIMATE BRUNCH WITH *French Chèvre*

Luscious, creamy and largely undiscovered, French Chèvres are the perfect ingredient for morning feasts.

BY LIZ THORPE

PHOTOS BY GREET TEUWEN

back in the '90s, I was introduced to French goat cheese by my college roommate. She bought it for brunch and called it "Chèvre." What a revelation that cheese was! I didn't know you could milk a goat or that the resulting fresh, spreadable cheese could offer everything cream cheese promised without its gummy, sticky texture. In the United States, Chèvre has become a catch-all for "French-style goat cheese," most notably the bright-white rindless style I first tasted in college. As the name has gained traction, it has become standard terminology for domestic producers, as it adds an air of authenticity. Understandably so, since France is the benchmark for goat cheeses with centuries of artisanal techniques passed down from one generation to the next. Today, there are thousands of goat cheese producers in France, making the number of cheeses and variety of styles impossible to count. There are the puckish and tart, the spillingly creamy, the mild, the firm, the austere and even the blue. It is a category filled with unsurpassed textures, flavors and shapes, perfect for creating hedonistic traditional brunch recipes—with a twist. A draping of silken, smoked salmon across toasted slabs of bread smeared with spreadable French goat cheese prove my collegiate associations of Chèvre are true memories and not just distorted remembrances of college days.

fresh chèvre pancakes with blueberries

Yield: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS: 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, 4 tbs. granulated sugar (divided), 1/2 tsp. kosher salt, 1 1/4 cups whole milk, 3 tbs. canola oil or melted butter, 2 large eggs, 1 cup crumbled fresh Chèvre, 2 pints blueberries, 1 tsp. minced fresh rosemary (optional), butter (as needed), confectioners' sugar

DIRECTIONS: In a medium bowl, add flour, 3 tbs. granulated sugar and salt, stirring together to combine. In another bowl, whisk together milk, oil/ butter and eggs until combined. Add wet ingredients and cheese into the dry ingredients, using a spatula to stir together until just combined. (Lumps in the pancake mixture are good because it means batter hasn't been over-mixed.) Cover, and place batter in the refrigerator to rest for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, in another medium bowl, mix blueberries, 1 tbs. granulated sugar and rosemary (optional) to combine. Reserve until needed. When pancake batter has rested, in a large nonstick pan, melt 1 tbs. butter over medium-high heat. Portion 1/4 cup amounts of batter onto pan, slightly flattening pancake with the back of a spatula. When bubbles form on the edges of the pancake's surface, flip pancake with a spatula. Cook until that side is browned, just another 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate. Continue with remaining batter, adding 1 tbs. butter for each batch, until batter has resulted in about 12 pancakes. Serve sprinkled with confectioners' sugar and reserved blueberries.



three-egg omelets with spinach, garlic and goat brie

If an omelet pan is not available, a nonstick 6- or 7-inch sauté pan can be substituted.

Yield: 4 omelettes

INGREDIENTS: 1 tbs. olive oil, 3 thinly-sliced garlic cloves, 2 (5-oz.) packages fresh spinach, 12 large eggs, 2 tbs. chopped chives divided, 2 tbs. water, 1/2 tsp. kosher salt, 1/4 tsp. ground pepper, 4 tbs. butter (cut into 4 pieces), 8 oz. Soignon Goat Brie sliced into evenly-sized pieces

DIRECTIONS: In a large sauté pan over medium-high heat, warm oil. Add garlic, stirring constantly and cooking just 30 seconds. Add half the spinach and stir until wilted, about 2 minutes. Add remaining spinach, again stirring constantly until all the spinach is cooked and wilted. Transfer spinach to a bowl, and use paper towels to pat down spinach to remove excess liquid.

In a large measuring bowl, whisk together eggs, 1 1/2 tbs. chives, water, salt, and pepper until foamy. In a small omelet pan, melt 1 butter piece over high heat. Pour one-fourth egg mixture into the pan. Let the eggs cook untouched for about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Using a heat-resistant spatula, push cooked edges of the eggs into the pan's center, letting the uncooked liquid move to the outer edge to cook. When no uncooked egg remains on the surface, keep omelet undisturbed for 20 seconds and remove from heat. On one half of the omelet, layer one-fourth of the reserved cooked spinach and one-fourth of the brie slices. Using a rubber spatula, fold the egg-side of the omelet over the filling-side and slide onto a plate. Cover with plastic wrap, and repeat with remaining ingredients to make 3 more omelets. Garnish with remaining chives and serve.





rye toast triangles with spreadable goat cheese, smoked salmon and dill sprigs

Yield: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS: 4 slices rye bread, 1 (5.3-ounces) Soignon Spreadable Goat Cheese, freshly-ground pepper, 8 ounces smoked salmon slices, 1 1/2 tbs. dill sprigs

DIRECTIONS: In batches, place rye slices into toaster or toaster oven until golden brown. Place slices onto a cutting board, and spread a generous layer of goat cheese on each piece (storing any remaining cheese in the fridge). Sprinkle with fresh pepper, layer smoked salmon pieces and garnish with dill sprigs. Using a serrated knife, cut each slice in half, and place on platter to serve.

In my house, omelets are usually a Sunday special, and a good omelet demands a molten center, with cheese that will spill and veritably run across the plate. In this case, a goat milk interpretation of the classic cow-milk Brie of Normandy insists on the luscious ooze of the classic, but with a lighter, crème-fraichy twang.

As is the case for imported fresh goat cheeses that are aged for less than 60 days, they must be made of pasteurized milk. However, today's Chèvres prove the days of mandatory tastelessness for pasteurized cheeses are over. In fact, the technology has improved so much that it is often difficult to taste the difference between the raw milk and pasteurized versions.

Other complex, pasteurized-milk cheeses include the lightly-aged goat cheeses characteristic of France's Loire Valley. An area known for its fabulous dairy products, many of the Loire Valley goat cheeses have been given a PDO (protected designation of origin) label, which protects specific production traditions. Names like Selles-sur-Cher

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and Sainte Maure-de-Touraine are raw milk cheeses that must be made with pasteurized milk before being exported to the US. In the past, these were considered inferior to their raw milk cousins, but that has changed with newer production techniques.

I can say, regardless of pasteurization,

these aged styles promise a complex and delightful dense, clay-like paste, with an edible white or ash bloomy rind and a piquant, persistent flavor. Softly melting in the mouth, discs of Sainte Maure offer insistent, nutty goodness and can be placed across quiches of all types. With cooking, these cheeses ooze into

islands of concentrated flavor that surprise the palate.

Something akin to lemon cream is captured in the simplest form of French chèvre, which showcases its high-quality milk. The incredible trick about unripened cheeses is that there is nothing to hide behind. This apparently



mushroom, leek and aged goat cheese quiche

Yield: 4 servings

INGREDIENTS: 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour (plus more for dusting), 1 tsp. kosher salt (divided), 1/2 tsp. granulated sugar, 1 stick unsalted butter (cold and cut into pieces), 2 to 4 tbs. ice water, 3 tbs. butter (divided), 3 to 4 leeks (white and light green parts, thinly sliced and washed), 2 (8-oz. containers) fresh baby bella mushrooms (thinly sliced), 4 large eggs, 1/2 cup whole milk, 1/4 tsp. ground pepper, 1 (9.9 oz) Sainte-Maure Caprifeuille aged goat cheese

DIRECTIONS: In a food processor bowl, add flour, 1/2 tsp. salt, and sugar. Briefly combine in food processor. Add cold butter pieces, and process until mixture resembles a coarse sand. Through the feeder tube, add water 1 tbs. at a time just until dough adheres together. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap, and let rest in the refrigerator for a minimum of 1 hour. Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat, melt 2 tbs. butter, and sauté leeks, stirring occasionally and cooking until softened, about 8 minutes. Add remaining 1 tbs. butter, mushrooms, and 1/4 tsp. salt, and reduce heat to medium-low. Stirring occasionally, let mushrooms cook down until tender, about 20 minutes. Remove from heat and reserve.

Preheat oven to 400° F. Prepare a 12-inch rectangular quiche tart pan by greasing it with cooking spray. Remove dough from the refrigerator and place on a floured cutting board. Dust the top of the dough with flour, and use a rolling pin to evenly roll out the dough in a rectangle shape so it's about 1 inch larger than the quiche pan. Roll the dough onto the rolling pin and gently drop onto quiche pan. Press the dough into the quiche pan and up the sides, patching pieces together if needed. Use a fork to prick holes onto the dough, cover with foil and line with pie weights, uncooked beans or a heat-proof dish, then cook in a preheated oven for 8 minutes. Remove the weights and foil, and let the pie crust cook 2 to 4 minutes more until slightly golden. Remove from oven, and reduce oven temp to 350° F.

Using a spatula, spread the entire reserved mushroom-leek mixture into the cooked quiche crust in one even layer. In a medium bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, 1/4 tsp. salt and pepper. Pour egg mixture over the mushrooms. Slice the cheese into 1/2-inch slices, and place slices into 2 horizontal rows of 5 pieces each. Place in the oven, and cook until the center of the quiche is cooked, about 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool, and serve warm, cold or at room temperature.



Cheese shops carry a wide variety of French Chèvre

simple cheese is a complex offering, balancing a citric acidity, fluffy texture and clean, milky finish.

Added to pancakes, a note of sweetness comes from the tart-yet-buttery crumble of fresh goat cheese.

The pleasure in creating a meal like this is reminding oneself that cheese,

however miraculous as a course unto itself, can also enhance the foods we eat every day. From the light and tangy fresh cheeses to the more complex, aged Chèvres, French goat cheeses add an element of lusciousness and elegance to any meal, but especially those special morning brunch dates. **CC**

Liz Thorpe is a 12 year veteran of the cheese industry, author of *The Cheese Chronicles* and former VP at Murray's Cheese. Currently, she is the cheese ambassador for The Goat Cheeses of France's The Original Chèvre campaign. Her ongoing mission is to educate consumers and raise awareness of the variety, flavor, texture and unique attributes that different cheeses--in this case, French goat cheeses--offer. Liz is working on her third book and starting her next venture, *The People's Cheese*.