



Get on board

Give your cheeseboard the edge
this Christmas with some lively new contenders

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Clockwise from top left:
Tunworth, No.1 Goat's
Milk Gouda, No.1 Leckford,
Montagnolo Affine,
Beemster Royaal Grand
Cru, No.1 Le Fleuret

Silton and Cheddar are usually the grands fromages of the festive

cheeseboard, with a young goat's cheese and mellow Brie generally playing the sparkling supporting cast. With such a huge range of cheeses out there to pick from, however, it seems a shame to always stick to familiar faces.

There's a wealth of choice to contend with from both home and abroad, so the question is where to begin. There are no hard and fast rules, but these are the main things to consider...

Contrast is key

A combination of colours, textures, shapes, sizes and ages creates visual interest and ensures a range of flavours, from subtle to punchy.

Go for big impact

A 'cheeseboard' can be a single bang-in-season cheese served at its absolute peak just as easily as a heaving board of multiple choices.

Trust the classic cheesy quartet...

Typically, there is something goaty, something hard, something soft and something blue.

...or mix it up

Try focusing on the cheeses of a single country or stick to one type of milk – you could choose a range of cheeses made from goat's milk or ewe's milk, for example.

Introduce a guest star

You might want to include a wild card to keep everyone on their toes – an interesting washed rind, a sheep's milk cheese or something that will artfully run off the plate, for example.

The quantity of quality

As a rough guide, figure on serving about 150g cheese (in total) per person.

Something on the side

Cheese needs interesting accompaniments – serve with fresh and dried fruit, chutney, some crunchy biscuits or good bread. »

The cheeses...

These are our top candidates for a showstopper 2023 cheeseboard

The soft

Tunworth (£8.50/250g)

This soft, bloomy-rinded cheese is often described as 'British Camembert'. The milk comes from a single herd, and it's made by the talented Stacey Hedges at Hampshire Cheese Co. If Camembert is your go-to cheese, you'll love Tunworth's beautifully wrinkled rind, along with its vegetal depths and long-lasting flavour.

Something different

No.1 Goat's Milk Gouda (£23/kg)

You know Gouda, that golden-hued Dutch cheese with a pliable texture and sweet, nutty flavour? Well, this is nothing like that. It's made with pasteurised goat's milk rather than cow, so it has a paler hue (goats don't store beta-carotene in their fat as cows do, which is why goat's cheese is comparatively pale) and a crumblier texture. It has the roundness and gentle sweetness you'd expect from Gouda, however, with a hint of caramel and an umami complexity.

The washed rind

No.1 Leckford (£6.50/150g)

This new semi-soft, washed-rind cheese is a real winner. With a lovely soft texture, it has rich savoury, mushroomy notes and an elegantly long finish. Made by hand at Nettlebed Creamery in Oxfordshire with pasteurised organic milk from the farm's own cows, it's washed regularly with Leckford's Sparkling Brut as it matures. If Epoisses or Langres figure on your usual cheeseboard, make way for this one.

The blue

Montagnolo Affine (£20/kg)

Stilton, the 'king of cheeses', may be the usual star of the cheeseboard, but blue cheese comes in many styles. This is a guaranteed crowd-pleaser with numerous awards to prove it. Despite the Italian-sounding name, it's made in Bavaria from pasteurised cow's milk enriched with cream, which helps to give it that soft, almost buttery texture. Delicately salty with a gentle 'blue'

character and biscuity flavours, this might win over those who find the taste of blue cheese a challenge.

The semi-hard

Beemster Royal Grand Cru (£35/kg)

The award-winning, longer-matured version of the popular No.1 Beemster Dutch Gouda from the Netherlands. This pasteurised cow's milk cheese is aged for 12 months – expect a golden colour, complex fruity flavours (similar to Gouda), a salty tang to balance its

sweetness and a nutty finish. Wonderful with apples, grapes and walnuts.

The goat

No.1 Le Fleuret (£6.15/150g)

Made in France from pasteurised goat's milk, this cheese has a fluffy white exterior that gives way to a softly yielding interior with a smooth, gently liquid layer just beneath the rind. Don't be fooled by its appearance: the flavour delivers a good wallop (it's strength 5) and a tanginess that really sets it apart.

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