



CHEESE PLATES



Tips For The Perfect Grilled Cheese Sandwich

Use real butter. The flavor of fresh butter is important for a gourmet grilled cheese sandwich.

Butter the outer side of the bread, not the pan. The butter will be more evenly distributed, which ensures a properly golden, crisp sandwich.

Grate or shred the cheese; it will melt faster.

When using dense breads, slice them no more than 1/2-inch thick, so that the heat can penetrate and melt the cheese.

Press the sandwich with a spatula after it's been flipped, to help the melted cheese spread evenly.

Use a nonstick pan instead of cast-iron. The sandwich is less likely to stick to the pan, which makes clean-up much easier.

Be sure that your butter is fresh. Otherwise, it will carry old refrigerator flavors onto your sandwich. See more butter tips.

If your budget doesn't allow for expensive cheeses, good condiments can easily punch up the flavor—from Dijon mustard to honey.

Balancing the fat of a grilled cheese sandwich with an acid flavor is a delicious counterpoint. Garnish the plate with gherkins or pickled vegetables.

Grilled Cheese Recipes

Classic Grilled Cheese Sandwich

Classic grilled cheese isn't a gourmet recipe. But it's easy to give the classic recipe a gourmet turn by using the finest cheese, bread, mustard and mayonnaise...and a great artisan pickle.

Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

8 slices firm-textured sandwich bread

Mayonnaise, optional

Mustard, optional

1/2 pound (8 ounces) Cheddar cheese,
mild, medium or sharp, grated

3 to 4 tablespoons butter, softened

Preparation

Spread bread slices with a thin layer of mayonnaise and/or mustard and evenly divide the grated Cheddar over four slices of bread.

Top with remaining four slices.

Heat half of the butter in a large (12-inch) skillet over medium heat.

Place sandwiches in skillet and spread remaining butter over top slices of bread.

Cover skillet.

Cook about 3 minutes, until underside is golden brown. Carefully flip sandwiched with spatula and continue cooking, uncovered, 2 to 3 minutes, until cheese is melted and underside is browned. Serve immediately.

Grilled Ham, Brie & Blue Cheese Sandwich

Anything with blue cheese will have lots of extra flavor. The raisin-pecan bread makes this sandwich a slam dunk.

Makes 1 serving.

Ingredients

2 slices (1/2-inch thick) rustic white country bread or hearty raisin-pecan bread

1 tablespoon apricot or peach

preserves

1 slice (1-1/2 ounces) Brie

2 slices thin-sliced ham

2 tablespoons crumbed blue cheese

1 teaspoon butter, melted

Preparation

Spread 1 slice of the bread with preserves.

Top with Brie, ham, blue cheese and the second slice of bread.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat.

Brush top and bottom of sandwich lightly with butter; place sandwich in skillet and cook about 4 minutes per side, until lightly browned and cheese begins to melt.

Ham & Cheese Frenchie

Makes 6 servings.

Ingredients

12 slices whole wheat bread

4 tablespoons butter, softened

6 slices of ham, bologna or luncheon meat

6 slices (1 ounce each) Cheddar cheese

3 eggs

1/2 cup milk

Dash of salt

Preparation

Spread bread with butter.

Prepare sandwiches of ham, bologna or luncheon meat, and cheese.

Beat together eggs, milk and salt.

Dip sandwiches in egg mixture.

Grill on lightly buttered griddle on medium heat until toasty and cheese begins to melt.

Turn and brown on other side.

Ham & Cheese With A Twist

Makes 1 serving.

Ingredients

2 slices marble rye bread or pretzel roll
1 tablespoon honey Dijon mustard
1 slice (1 ounce) Gouda cheese
2 slices of ham
2 very thin slices of red onion or caramelized onions* (optional)
4 to 6 fresh spinach leaves, washed and patted dry
1 slice (1 ounce) Dill Havarti cheese
1 teaspoon butter, melted

*To make caramelized onions, cut a small onion in half and slice thinly. Melt 1/2 teaspoon butter in a skillet. Add onion slices, a pinch each of salt and sugar; cook and stir over medium-high heat about 5 minutes or until the onion begins to brown. Add 1 tablespoon water and continue cooking on medium-low heat, 10 to 15 minutes or until the onion is a deep golden brown.

Preparation

Spread bread slices with mustard.

Layer Gouda, ham, onion, spinach and Dill Havarti between the bread.

Heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Brush the top and bottom of the sandwich lightly with butter.

Place sandwich in the skillet and cook about 3 minutes per side, until bread crisps slightly and cheese begins to melt.

South Of The Border Grilled Cheese

Spice up your grilled cheese sandwich with salsa, green chiles, taco seasoning and jalapeño bread.

Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients

1/4 cup tomato-based salsa
2 tablespoons fire-roasted canned, diced green chiles, drained
1 teaspoon taco seasoning
2 tablespoons butter, softened
8 slices hearty artisan jalapeño bread or tomato bread (1/2 inch thick)
4 ounces (1 cup) queso quesadilla cheese,* shredded

*You may substitute another Hispanic melting cheese such as Asadero, Queso Oaxaca or Monterey Jack. Learn more in our article on Hispanic cheese.

Preparation

In a small bowl, combine salsa, chiles and taco seasoning; let stand 5 minutes.

Butter one side of each slice of bread. Spread salsa mixture on the non-buttered side of 4 slices of bread; top each slice with 1/4 cup cheese. Cover with the remaining 4 slices of bread, buttered side out.

Place the sandwiches on an electric griddle heated to 275°F, or in a preheated skillet over medium heat.

Cook 4 to 5 minutes per side, or until the bread is golden brown and the cheese is melted.

Tuscan-Style Grilled Cheese Sandwich

Crusty sourdough bread, two great cheeses, roasted vegetables and fresh basil leaves are a wonderful combination of textures and tastes.

Makes 6 servings.

Ingredients

18 spears (1 pound) grilled asparagus (substitute zucchini when asparagus isn't in season)

1/2 cup prepared balsamic-garlic-olive oil vinaigrette

12 slices crusty sourdough bread

12 slices (6 ounces) Fontina cheese

12 slices (8 ounces) fresh mozzarella cheese (from 4 ounce ovals)

1 cup (1 ounce) fresh basil leaves

1 cup (6 ounces) roasted red pepper pieces

12 slices (6 ounces) provolone cheese

Extra virgin olive oil, as needed

Fresh figs (optional)

Preparation

Toss grilled asparagus with vinaigrette and let stand covered and refrigerated, at least 2 hours before using. Reserve.

Lay 6 slices of bread on clean, flat surface. Top each slice with (in order) 2 slices Fontina, 3 marinated drained asparagus spears, 2 slices fresh mozzarella, 6 fresh basil leaves, 2-1/2 tablespoons red pepper and 2 slices provolone.

Top with second slice of bread and brush both sides of sandwich with olive oil. Heat a large non-stick skillet over medium heat and grill sandwiches on both sides until golden brown.

Transfer to a baking sheet and keep warm in 350°F oven 8 to 10 minutes or until heated through.

Serve with fresh figs.

Some Adventurous Grilled Cheese Thought-Starters

Grilled cheese is the great diplomat of snacks: It pleases everyone. Here are some variations on a theme - all warm, gooey, crisp, and satisfying.

1. Apple and Aged Cheddar Grilled Cheese. Apples and cheese are a classic snack that improves with the application of heat. Put apple and aged cheddar between slices of walnut bread for a nutty, sweet taste.

2. Asian Pear and Gouda Grilled Cheese. The apple-and-cheese combination got us thinking about other crispy-fruity-cheesy matches. This Asian pear and Gouda combo will quickly become a favorite.

3. Grape and Taleggio Grilled Cheese. This may seem like a strange pairing for a toasted sandwich, but try it. The grapes get a soaking in grappa to boost the fruit's floral qualities, and the Taleggio's meltiness contrasts fabulously against the crunch of the whole wheat bread.
4. Roasted Beet and Chèvre Grilled Cheese. The combo of roasted beets and chèvre is normally found in French salads topped with vinaigrette, but it's even tastier as a sandwich. To mimic the flavors of the classic café salad, the roasted beets are dipped in vinegar before being sandwiched.
5. Sun-Dried Tomato, Parsley, and Manchego Grilled Cheese. Here we chopped up everything to ensure the flavors blended as thoroughly as possible. The punches of intense tomato, herby parsley, and nutty cheese make for a tasty snack.
6. Mozzarella, Prosciutto, and Fig Jam Panino. A sweet-salty take that's a real crowd-pleaser.
7. Black Forest Ham, Caramelized Onions, and Cambozola Grilled Cheese. Ham and cheese is a timeless combination. It only gets tastier when you toast it up in this sandwich with onions.
8. Banana and Fromage Blanc Grilled Cheese. For the sweet toothed among us. Fromage blanc and diced banana are mixed with vanilla then slathered on cinnamon toast for a sandwich that's just as good for dessert as it is for breakfast.