



Keeping Cheese at its Best: Storage and Handling Tips from the Experts

It is a common misconception – even among top chefs and foodservice professionals – that all cheese is alike and can be treated as such. The truth is, every cheese is unique, and how you handle and store it greatly affects its overall flavor and quality.

The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board and Wisconsin cheesemakers have developed guidelines and recommendations for the proper storage of different cheese varieties.

Cheese Handling – Clean, Cold and Covered

Inspection – You should never accept cheese that has torn or careless wrapping or an interior temperature above 45 degrees Fahrenheit.

Storage – Designate a cheese storage location in your refrigerator or cooler that is free from strongly aromatic foods. The cheese may absorb the aromas while “breathing.”

Cutting – Avoid cross-contamination of cheese flavors by always using a different knife and cutting board to cut different types of cheeses, or simply clean knives and boards in between cuttings.





Cheese Sanitation

Proper sanitation practices are important for any food product, but especially for cheese because natural cheese is a living food that remains biologically active.

Sanitation Guidelines:

- Clean your work area and tools with sanitizing solution. The solution should not come in direct contact with food.
- Wipe the surface of naturally bandaged cheese, cheeses with rinds and waxed cheeses with a cleaning solution (brine) prior to cutting.
- Cover cutting boards with plastic wrap, waxed paper or parchment before trimming cheeses with mold or cutting waxed cheeses.
- In general, if you find mold, use a clean knife to trim the mold 1 to 2-inches from the rest of the cheese.

Cheese Storage – The Necessary Tools

Stock your kitchen with the following storage accessories:

- Parchment paper
- Wax paper
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic wrap
- Cheese dome
- Clean cutting boards
- Two types of plastic storage containers: one with holes and one without

Rindless Cheese

The rindless cheese category includes both fresh cheeses such as Mascarpone, Fresh Mozzarella, Queso Blanco, Ricotta, Chevre and Feta, as well as semi-soft cheeses such as Muenster, Havarti, Cheddar, Colby, Baby Swiss, Swiss, Farmers, Fontina, Monterey Jack and Queso Quesadilla.

- *Fresh, rindless cheeses* should be stored at 35 to 39 degrees Fahrenheit. If the cheese is purchased in a plastic container, continue to cover it tightly in storage.
- *Semi-soft, rindless cheese* should be stored at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Cut cheese should be wrapped in parchment or waxed paper first and then again in plastic wrap.

Natural Rind Cheese

The natural rind category includes semi-hard and hard grating cheeses such as Parmesan, Romano, Asiago, GranQueso, Aged Provolone and Kasseri. Store natural rind cheeses at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit tightly wrapped in plastic wrap to prevent moisture loss.

Washed Rind Cheese

Examples of washed rind cheeses include Gruyère, Limburger, Raclette, Butterkäse, Italian-style Fontina, Brick and Wisconsin originals such as Knight's Vail, Les Frères, Pleasant Ridge Reserve and Italico™.

Store washed rind cheese at 40 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit at an elevated humidity of 65 percent. Wrap it in waxed or parchment paper and place it in a plastic container pierced with several holes to allow air circulation.

Bloomy Rind Cheese

Bloomy rind cheeses include Camembert, Brie and some Chevres. Store bloomy rind cheese at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit at an elevated humidity level. After the cheese is cut, place a thin piece of parchment paper over the exposed area and use the original wrapping to cover the cheese.

Blue-Veined Cheese

The blue-veined cheese category includes Blue cheese and firm or Italian-style Gorgonzola. Store blue-veined cheese at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit at elevated humidity levels. The cheese should be wrapped in aluminum foil.

The storage information discussed here is available in a convenient set of laminated note cards. To order a complete set of the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board's "Cheese Storage Tips for Foodservice Professionals," visit www.foodservice.WisDairy.com.