Best crackers for cheese: a cracker for every cheese on the board

From the crackers.biz wiki

Match the cracker to the strength of the cheese. Soft, gentle cheeses such as Brie shine on a plain water biscuit or a cream cracker; oatcakes and fruit crackers suit Cheddar and blue cheese; rye crispbread and seeded crackers stand up to strong and goat's cheeses. Put out three kinds of cracker, and allow 50 to 75g of cheese per person after dinner.

Start with the cheese, then choose the cracker

A cheese board is a conversation between two things: the cheese, which has all the flavour, and the cracker, which has all the crunch. Get the pairing right and each makes the other better. Get it wrong and a strong cracker drowns a gentle cheese, or a delicate wafer snaps under a hunk of mature Cheddar.

The simplest rule is to match strength with strength. Mild, soft and creamy cheeses want a plain, crisp cracker that stays out of the way. Firm, tangy and salty cheeses can take something with more body, such as oats, wholemeal wheat or rye. Very strong cheeses need a cracker with a bold flavour of its own. Below we go through the main kinds of cheese you are likely to put out, and the crackers from our shelf that suit each one. For an overview of every cracker family, see our guide to every kind of cracker.

Soft and creamy: Brie, Camembert and their cousins

Soft cheeses with a white rind are gentle, buttery and rich. They melt on the tongue, so the cracker underneath should be crisp, thin and quiet. Water biscuits suit the job perfectly: flour and water, baked until brittle, and on Wikipedia's account usually eaten with cheese or wine. Carr's Table Water is the everyday choice, and the large size gives a wedge of Brie more room.

A cream cracker works too, especially one with a few flaky layers, and so does a plain sourdough cracker. If you like a sweet note with soft cheese, the way chutney or grapes add one, try Peter's Yard fig and spelt, which puts the fruit and the crunch into a single bite.

Hard and crumbly: Cheddar, Red Leicester and Wensleydale

Firm British cheeses have more going on: tang, salt, a crumbly bite and sometimes crunchy crystals in a well aged Cheddar. They need a cracker with a bit of backbone. Jacob's Cream Crackers are a sound choice, sturdy enough to take a thick slice. Oatcakes are even better with a mature Cheddar, because the toasted oat flavour and slight sweetness sit so well against the salt. Nairn's Rough Oatcakes bring plenty of texture, while Nairn's Fine Oatcakes are smoother and neater on a party plate.

Some people like a touch of sweetness against a salty Cheddar. For that, choose a cracker with fruit baked in: Ryvita Fruit Crunch has currants, seeds and oats, and Peter's Yard Fig and Spelt brings fig to a sourdough cracker.

Wensleydale has its own tradition. According to Wikipedia, in Yorkshire and the North East of England it is often eaten with fruit cake or Christmas cake. If you are serving it that way, a plain oatcake on the side gives guests who prefer a savoury bite somewhere to go.

Blue cheese: Stilton and friends

Blue cheese is salty, creamy and bold, and it rewards a cracker with sweetness and grain. Oatcakes and fruit crackers both work well, and a rye crispbread suits anyone who likes a sharper contrast. Stockan's Thick Oatcakes from Orkney are sturdy enough for a generous slice.

Stilton is worth knowing a little about before it goes on the board. Since 1996 the name has been protected in law, as a protected designation of origin, so real Stilton can only come from Derbyshire, Leicestershire or Nottinghamshire. By September 2016 just six dairies were licensed to make it. The village of Stilton itself is not allowed to use the name, because it sits outside those three counties. Wikipedia notes that it is traditionally eaten at Christmas and traditionally paired with port or barley wine.

Goat's cheese and fresh cheeses

Fresh goat's cheese is bright, lemony and a little chalky. It pairs beautifully with crackers that bring seeds, herbs or rye. Try Ryvita Thins Multi Seed, Peter's Yard rosemary and sea salt or Ryvita Thins rosemary and sea salt. Our article on seeded crackers explains what each seed brings.

The big, bold ones

A cheese with a washed rind, or a hard cheese aged for years, can flatten almost any cracker. Here a dense, dark cracker earns its place. Ryvita Dark Rye has the earthy flavour to match, and a rough oatcake does the same job with a softer crunch. Rye crispbread has deep roots in Sweden, where, according to Wikipedia, it has been baked since at least the sixth century; our crispbread article has the full story.

The easy way: a cracker selection

If you would rather not choose, a mixed box does it for you. Jacob's Biscuits for Cheese brings eight varieties in one pack, Carr's Cracker Selection keeps things classic, and the Peter's Yard selection box dresses up a dinner party board. Every mixed box we sell is on our cracker selections shelf.

How much cheese, and how many cheeses

The Academy of Cheese gives clear figures. For a cheese course after dinner, allow 50 to 75g per person. For a grazing board or drinks party, 75 to 100g. For a cheese and wine tasting, 100 to 125g, and if cheese is the main course, 150 to 200g. After a full meal they suggest up to three cheeses; a grazing board can carry four or five, from different families.

For crackers there is no official rule, so we plan on a couple of crackers per cheese for each guest and open a spare box. Once resealed, crackers keep, so nothing goes to waste.

Serving the board

Take the cheese out of the fridge 30 to 60 minutes before you eat, as the Academy of Cheese recommends, so the flavours have time to wake up. Arrange it so guests can work from mild to strong. Give the crackers a plate of their own, or a corner of the board well away from anything wet, and they will stay crisp. Give each cheese its own knife, and pop a little card beside each one so nobody has to ask.

If a guest avoids gluten, keep their crackers on a separate plate with their own knife. Nairn's gluten free oatcakes and Schar Crispbread are both made without gluten; always check the pack, and see our guide to gluten free crackers for more. For the story of the most famous cheese cracker of all, read about Carr's of Carlisle, and for a closer look at the Scottish option, our guide to oatcakes.

Quick facts

Cheese after dinner	50 to 75g per person (Academy of Cheese)
Drinks party or grazing board	75 to 100g per person
Cheese as the main event	150 to 200g per person
How many cheeses	Up to three after a big dinner, four or five for a grazing board
Out of the fridge	30 to 60 minutes before serving
Order of eating	Mildest first, strongest last

Questions people ask

Which crackers go with Brie?

Something plain and crisp that lets the cheese do the talking: Carr's Table Water, a cream cracker, or a sourdough cracker. A fig cracker adds a sweet note that suits soft, creamy cheeses.

What should I serve with Stilton?

Oatcakes, or a cracker with fruit in it. Their slight sweetness and rough texture balance the salt and tang of blue cheese far better than a thin, delicate cracker.

Which crackers go with goat's cheese?

Seeded crackers, rye thins or anything with rosemary. Goat's cheese is fresh and sharp, and a nutty, herby cracker gives it something to lean on.

How many crackers should I buy for a cheese board?

There is no official figure, so we plan on a couple of crackers for each cheese, for each guest, and open a spare pack. Crackers keep well once sealed again, so an extra box is never wasted.

Should the crackers go on the board with the cheese?

Put them on a separate plate or at the edge of the board. Crackers sitting against soft cheese or grapes pick up moisture and lose their crunch.

Sources

1. How much cheese per person: the complete guide for every occasion, Academy of Cheese
2. Stilton cheese, Wikipedia
3. Wensleydale cheese, Wikipedia
4. Water biscuit, Wikipedia
5. Oatcake, Wikipedia
6. Crispbread, Wikipedia

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