

Beer and Cheese Pairings

Generally when one thinks of pairing a beverage with cheese, wine is almost always the first choice. It's so prevalent a concept that it even makes for "play-on-word" style jokes..."would you like some cheese with that whine".

As natural as pairing wine with cheese seems to be, there are some around the globe that believe that it may not be the ideal pairing. Wine is naturally acidic, and as a result it quickly washes off the cheese coating on the tongue. Unfortunately, it's the cheese coating that contains most of the cheese flavour. By contrast, a beer will blend with this cheese coating, making for a tantalizing array of flavour combinations.

Beyond its decreased acidity, the carbonation and maltiness of beer compliments the creaminess and thick mouth feel of many cheeses. As a result, beer makes a very complimentary pairing with cheese. Many believe it is because both beer and cheese are "farmhouse" products. Cheese was made by farmers when there was an excess of milk, thus converting the milk (with a little help from some bacteria) into a solid form that was better able to resist spoiling. Beer was made in the winters when there was no harvesting to be done. The commonality between the two is grain. Beer is made from a cereal grain (barley usually) and milk is a by-product of cows eating grain. The result of the two creation processes is a distinct level of commonality in both aroma and taste characteristics.

As with wine and cheese pairings, there is little in the way of "written in stone" rules about beer and cheese pairings, but there are certainly some things to consider. The most important is that your personal preference should be your guide. If you like it, who cares if it supposedly violates some rule somebody made up.

General Guidelines

Balance: Beer and cheese pairing can work much like wine and food pairings. Try to balance the tastes between each other, as you don't want a situation where one product overpowers the other. If a cheese is light in taste, then pair with a beer that is also light in taste. For example, an aggressively bitter India Pale Ale (IPA) will overpower lighter tasting foods...all you will taste is the IPA.

Texture: Texture, or mouth feel, is another important aspect of balance. The richer the cheese, the more effervescent a beer should be to help cut through the fatty richness of the cheese. Generally, beers with a higher density and a substantial mouth feel should be paired with cheeses that have a similar characteristic.

Complements: In general, a good pairing guideline is to match flavours. If the cheese is abundant in nut flavours, then pair with a beer that also exhibits nut tastes in its flavour profile.

Contrasts: Sometimes (and certainly not in every case) a cheese and a beer that seem to be complete opposites can actually pair well. What usually happens is that one or two of the taste elements that seem at odds actually enhance each other to provide new and interesting taste traits. Try pairing a light and spicy cheese with a heavy and malty beer, you might be surprised. If a cheese is really spicy, try to avoid a beer that is bitter. The bitterness will actually enhance the spiciness of the cheese.

Regions: While not always a slam dunk, matching beer and cheese by region can yield some interesting taste combinations. Matching British cheese with British ale can give you a feel for what a typical beer and cheese pairing may be like for someone in England.

With the generalities out of the way, here are some common cheese selections and some suggested beer pairings.

Cheese	Beer Type	Suggestion
Asiago	Malty Brown Ales	Garrison Nut-Brown Ale
Blue Cheese	Trappist Ale, Stout	Koningshoeven Tripel Trappist Ale
Brie	Stout	Guinness Stout
Cheddar (Mild)	Pilsner	Pilsner Urquell
Cheddar (Stronger)	Pale Ale (with good hopping)	Pumphouse S.O.B
Colby	Brown Ale	Newcastle Brown Ale
Feta	Wheat Ale	Hacker-Pschorr Weisbier
Gouda	Amber Ales, Porters	Fullers London Porter
Mascarpone	Fruit Ales, Stout	St. Ambrose Apricot Wheat Ale
Parmesan	India Pale Ale	Picaroons Yippee IPA

Written by Jeff Budd, NB Liquor product advisor at the Vaughan Harvey Blvd., Moncton store.