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Harvest Cheese Board

Ingredients

Fall cheese and fruit platters are easy and great fun to put together. Use brightly colored birch, maple and ash leaves to hold the cheese - big rounds of Canadian and Vermont Cheddars are favorites. This is one time when guests can cut away but be sure to pick up the crumbs from time to time so the platter always looks fresh and clean. Accompany the cheese with a wide assortment of unusual grapes - black, red, Concord - all in perfect clusters.

Cheese boards are one of my favorite things to throw together for a party. My favorite part about them is how they can be customized to suit the season. It's easy to create an elegant cheese plate at home by grabbing up a few key ingredients from the Farmer's Market and following these four simple steps.

Step 1: Choose your Cheeses

My method of attack is to choose two or three cheeses of varying types:

Aged: Havarti, Sharp Cheddar, Swiss
Soft: Brie, Chevre, Camembert
Blue: Blue Cheese, Roquefort, Gorgonzola
Firm: Mimolette, Manchego, Parmesan, Pecorino

Step 2: Add your Accompaniments

Crackers or Bread. I love to serve up my cheeses with some artisanal crackers and crusty baguette.

Fresh Fruit. Grab whatever looks great from the Farmer's Market. During the fall season, you'll find some spectacular pears, apples, and grapes. I love Honeycrisp apples for this!

Charcuterie. Thinly sliced prosciutto and salami were my meats of choice here.

Olives. Kalamata and Castelvetrano olives are two of my favorites.

Nuts. Walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachios, Marcona almonds, even candied nuts. Pumpkin seeds would also make a nice accompaniment.

Honey. Honey pairs so well with fresh cheese. Try it with soft goat cheese or pungent blue cheese.

Apple Butter. As a special touch for this Harvest Cheese Board, I decided on a homemade Apple Butter. I thought it would be the perfect way to tie in the flavors that just call out "fall" to me – Cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and allspice. But you can take a shortcut here and just purchase a jar ;)

Step 3: Garnish for the Season

Grab a big board or platter and start arranging. I like to place my cheeses first and then I'll gather some greenery like apple leaves, orange leaves, dried corn husks, fresh herbs (I used sage here) and edible flowers. Slice up some of the fruit and arrange them on your platter along with the charcuterie, small dishes of olives, and your honey and apple butter spread. Be sure to have separate serving utensils for each of the cheeses and spreads, as well as a small dish for olive pits.

Step 4: Open the Wine

Choose two or three different types of wine, based on the number of cheeses you choose. Some of my favorite wines for pairing with cheese are Cabernet

Sauvignon, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

"Winter is an etching, spring a watercolor, summer an oil painting, and autumn a mosaic of them all."

~ Stanley Horowitz