

ITALIAN-STYLE CHEESES

A Love Affair with Mozzarella and More



According to a 2018 USDA report, Italian-style cheeses accounted for over five billion pounds of the 12+ billion pounds of cheese produced in the United States in 2017. The proliferation of pizza on menus across the country – no longer limited to Italian restaurants – has helped expand the market for not only Mozzarella, but also Provolone and Parmesan.

Overall, Mozzarella is the No. 1-produced cheese in the country. California cheese processors produced 1.4 billion pounds of this Italian favorite, making the state America's top Mozzarella producer. Within California, Mozzarella accounts for about 59% of the total cheese production. While it has long been known as “the pizza cheese,” foodservice operators are finding multiple ways to incorporate milky, soft, luscious fresh Mozzarella and the firmer, drier, grate-able versions into dishes.

ITALIAN-STYLE CHEESE FACTS

Mozzarella is made in fresh and drier styles; the latter can also be smoked. Both are produced with whole milk or part-skim milk.

Parmesan comes from the word “Parmesano,” which means “of or from Parma” in Italian. Parmesan-style cheese made in America incorporates the Old World practices: Cow's milk curds are cooked, salted or brined, and allowed to age for a minimum of 10 months. The longer the aging, the deeper the flavor.

Provolone is a semi-hard cheese with a mild, smoky flavor. It gets firmer as it ages. And like Mozzarella, it's a pulled or stretched-curd cheese, and comes in two varieties: dolce (mild, aged 2 to 3 three months) and piccante (aged 6 to 12 months and with a sharp taste).

Asiago and **Romano**, which are Italian-style cheeses with a sharp, caramel flavor, are used to add depth of flavor to lasagna and upscale macaroni and cheese, sprinkled on pizza crust, and as grating alternatives to Parmesan.



STORAGE & HANDLING

Most cheeses will maintain their flavor and quality in a refrigerator for extended periods, but use the following guidelines for storing cheese after opening:

- Fresh cheeses should be treated just like milk and kept refrigerated. Many fresh cheeses can last for a few weeks if properly stored, so note the freshness date on the package before you buy. If you detect mold on a fresh cheese, discard it.
- Soft-ripened cheeses will keep for several weeks if properly stored.
- Semi-hard and hard cheeses will last four to eight weeks if properly stored. After opening consider removing the original plastic wrap and re-wrapping in parchment or wax paper, which allows the cheese to breathe. After re-wrapping a cheese, store in a covered plastic container or resealable food storage bag and open it a couple times a week to let in fresh air.



FOODSERVICE APPLICATIONS

Back-of-the-House

Italian-style cheeses are the foundation of pizza as Mozzarella, Provolone and Parmesan are the leading cheese toppings. Many other Italian dishes, such as lasagna, ravioli, and chicken Parmesan, include generous portions of these cheeses.

The Parmesan-laden Caesar salad is *de rigueur*, but that doesn't mean there isn't room for diversification. Change up the greens, from romaine to kale, arugula, even Brussel sprouts leaves, and add grilled salmon or tuna to the Parm party. In lemon Parmesan risotto with asparagus, the assertive cheese complements the tart citrus. Mix fresh Mozzarella with salty ham and honeydew melon for an upscale first course. And mild, creamy Ricotta is a carrier for almost any sweet and savory ingredients.

Front-of-the-House

Parmesan grated over warm pasta dishes are must-offers to customers. The deep, nutty flavor of this cheese adds depth to just about any pasta dish. The Mozzarella, tomato and basil salad known as *Caprese*, has graduated from specialty summer to an everyday salad on the menu.



WHAT'S TRENDING

Burrata Booming

Diners on the West and East coasts discovered Burrata a decade or more ago, and now Middle America has access to this unctuously rich and silky cheese, thanks to overnight shipping. Burrata ("battered" in Italian) is a pouch filled with Mozzarella and fresh cream. Cut into the pouch and milky decadence spills onto the plate. It's great with a drizzle of olive oil and a grind of pepper, but truly shines when served with juicy tomatoes and fresh greens, and smeared on garlic-rubbed, grilled bread. Burrata is also becoming more popular on pizza.

Ricotta for Breakfast

Yogurt and cereal will never be replaced as breakfast staples, but a bowl of Ricotta cheese with fresh fruit, drizzled with honey and topped with crunchy granola, is a smart addition to any menu. Given the popularity of avocado toast, chefs have added toast items with Ricotta as a base. These new items are topped with sun-dried tomatoes, olive blends and capers and olive oil.

© California Milk Advisory Board. An Instrumentality of the California Department of Food and Agriculture.



For more information about CMAB Foodservice:
209.883.6455 (MILK) | businessdevelopment@cmab.net | www.RealCaliforniaMilk.com/Foodservice