

How to judge a cheese?

It's all in your rind



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You can tell a lot about a cheese by its exterior, whether it's fuzzy, craggy, smooth or smelly. Even before you taste a cheese, the rind gives hints to the style of cheese, allows you to evaluate its condition and even take a guess at its flavour profile.

Far more than just a byproduct of cheese-making, a rind can protect a cheese, promote ripening, augment flavour and provide a visual and textural contrast to the paste. Here are some specifics to think about next time you go cheese hunting.

Bloomy Rind: This velvety white rind is found on soft-ripened cheeses such as brie or Camembert. When expertly made, it should be thin and moist enough to appear smooth with no cracks. Often these rinds will smell of fresh mushrooms. The downy covering is created from the addition of a bacteria called *penicillium candidum*, which also causes the cheese to ripen from outside in. If you see a crinkly, brainy-looking bloomy rind on a cheese (like Italy's La Tur) this effect is due to the addition of a mould called *Geotrichum* that encourages bloomy rind formation.

Washed Rind: These cheeses' distinctive exteriors feature sunset hues of copper and pale pink. Also known as "smear ripened," the rinds of cheeses like Taleggio and Époisse will often be moist to the touch, slightly sandy and in most cases smell a little like a barnyard. Famous for its pungency, a washed rind's salty, earthy flavour and the rind's gritty texture is part of the cheese's complexity. Washed rinds are created by being routinely washed with brine (sometimes wine, beer or spirits) during ripening. This moist rind welcomes the growth of bacteria which ripen the cheese from the surface in and develop its addictively smelly persona.

Ash Rind: These rinds are most often found on softer goat cheeses, such as Grey Owl from Quebec. Ash is often decorative, but was at one time used to shield the cheese from insects and was thought to help dry out the exterior of the cheese. The alkalinity of the ash also helps counter acidity, keeping flavours mellow and aiding ripening.

Mixed Rinds: Ash can also be combined with a bloomy rind - an example is Prestige from Quebec. A bloomy rind and a washed rind can be also combined on a cheese like Romelia from Saltspring Island, B.C.



Natural Rinds: You'll find natural rinds on wheels, such as Comté, Emmenthal or Pecorino. The rind forms from the cheese's exterior contact with the air which hardens the surface and protects the cheese. Natural rinds still need constant care – the cheeses are turned

and brushed regularly to keep mould growth under control and to ensure even rind development. Some rinds of semi-firm and firm cheeses are also washed in brine or in the case of Parmesan Reggiano, rubbed with oil to help prevent moisture loss.

Herbed Rind: A cheese like the Corsican Brin D'Amour is coated in herbs to add flavour and aesthetic appeal. Done well, the herbed crust delicately compliments the cheese, done improperly it overwhelms and can even become bitter.

Clothbound/ Bandaged cheddar: Many cheddars we eat are rindless because they are vacuum-sealed or encased in wax so never exposed to air. Traditional cheddars like Keens and Montgomery from England are wrapped in cloth and then rubbed with lard, which protects and shapes the cheddar as it ages while keeping it moist. It also imparts a wonderfully musty, root-cellar aroma and causes a mottled blue/green mould growth on the rind.

Artificial Rinds: Some cheeses are protected by a non-edible rind such as wax. The coloured wax coating may be sending a message. Most factory-made Goudas are covered in red wax, green wax indicates the addition of herbs and black wax indicates aged Gouda.

Sue Riedl studied at the Cordon Bleu in London.

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