

HOW TO BUILD A CHEESE BOARD

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

1. **Find a suitable surface**—I prefer a wooden or slate cutting board, but a plate or serving tray works just fine too.
2. **Select your cheeses**—I typically do 4: 1 soft, 1 adventurous, 1 plain and 1 flavored. This gives a nice variety for your guests to have different “experiences” with each. If you’re having this as an appetizer before a meal, 2-3 oz/person total is a good go-to.
3. **Select meat**—I tend to do a lot more cheese than meat on a platter. Just pick 1-2 to add as a compliment or pairing to one of your cheeses. Think cured or smoked meats- salami, prosciutto, speck, coppa, etc. Summer sausage or beef sticks are good too. I usually do 1 oz/person
4. **Pick out some sides**—Dips, pickled things, dried/fresh fruits, nuts, and sweets are my go-to’s. I usually do:
 - a. 1-2 dips (honey, jam, pepper jelly)
 - b. 1 pickled item (my go-to is olives or dill pickles)
 - c. 2-4 fruits (dried: cranberries, apricots, prunes, figs; fresh: sliced apples, blueberries, pears, pomegranates)
 - d. 2-4 nuts (almonds, cashews, peanuts, edamame, pistachios)
 - e. 1-2 sweets (chocolate covered nuts/fruit/caramel/etc, sweet or candied nuts, chocolate bar pieces)

Note: you don't NEED to include all of these—whatever you have on hand will do just fine! No need to stock up on items you might not use up.



LET'S DO THIS THING:

1. **Prep your cheeses**—A nice, sharp, thin knife is a great tool here. If you happen to have a wire cheese cutter that works really well too—our local cheese shop (Bongards' Cheese Shop) has these for relatively cheap.
 - a. **Block of cheese:** I typically use a 3 step process: 1. Slice block into 1-2 inch rectangle 2. Cut the rectangle in half at a diagonal (so you have 2 triangle halves) 3. Slice triangles for nice looking pieces. Alternatively, you can just slice these into squares or rectangles!
 - b. **Wedge of cheese:** Flip on it's side so the “triangle” part is facing the side. Slice from the rind (outside edge) towards the center.
 - c. **Soft cheeses:** If you're using a soft, spreadable cheese like a chevre, it's easiest to just leave it in the “log” shape it comes in, but I like to use a cookie scooper and make it look like a pile of ice cream on the board. Put a cute holiday butter knife in it and call it good. Other soft cheeses (like a brie or camembert) can be left whole with a little knife on the board OR you can slice them, depending on the size. Sometimes I'll take a thin slice of the top rind off to expose the gooey center to make it more inviting. The rinds on these ARE edible and a part of the flavor profile!
 - d. **Crumbly cheese:** If you have a cheese that's dry and aged or a blue that doesn't want to slice, I suggest using the “crumble” method. Just take a small knife or fork and press into the cheese and twist. You'll end up with yummy little “chunks” of cheese that are delicious and less of a hassle. I recommend leaving the piece whole until you have it placed on your platter (see assemble)
2. **Prep your meats**
 - a. **Whole Salami/Summer Sausage:** Remove the outer wrapping and slice. Personally I prefer a thinner slice when pairing with a cheese, but it's all up to you.

- b. **Beef/Pepper sticks:** Cut into bite size pieces for easy eating
- c. **Pre-Sliced:** No cutting required. These often fold up nicely—for round, thinly sliced salamis or pepperonis just fold in half, and then in half again. If you “pile” these in a line they can look pretty and fun. For speck or prosciutto you can cut in half and “roll” them, or twist them into cute little florets.

3. Prep your sides

- a. Dips go well in little containers like small mason jars or little holiday dishes,
- b. Pickled Items I typically dry items off a bit if they’re going directly next to the cheeses. Alternatively, these could also go in a little dish.
- c. Fruits Fresh fruits can just be sliced like normal. For apples or pears, be sure to dip in lemon or pineapple juice to prevent browning. Dried fruits are typically fine as is. I do like to cut dried figs in half because the inside looks pretty.
- d. Nuts are fine on the board as is.
- e. Sweets like chocolate bars can just be broken into little bite size chunks need be.

4. Assemble

- a. **Big ticket items first:** I like to place my “big” items like apples/pears or dips first because they are items that can be fun to work around. They also add a nice pop of color so you want them spread throughout the board.



b. Cheese:

- i. If you have a “non sliced” cheese, place that first. This includes your chevre logs, whole bries, or crumbly cheeses that you want to have a “wedge” look.
- ii. If you have slices that go well with one of your “big ticket items”, work around that first. Example: if you have a cheddar and a jam paired, I like to “wrap” the cheese around the jam to let people know they should try them together
- iii. No shame in googling cheeseboards or scrolling pinterest or instagram to get ideas on how to “set” cheeses on a board. My instagram and facebook have lots of ideas!

c. Meat:

- i. Fill in around your cheeses with the meat- again, pictures on facebook or instagram will help with this.

d. Sides:

- i. If you have big holes left, I usually place bigger items like olives, pickles, prunes or figs first. Then you can put your nuts or other smaller items (like cranberries or blueberries) to fill in the gaps. Nuts are usually pretty universal and taste good with everything. For pickles or olives, I try to place them towards the edge of a board and not put them next to sweet things like the chocolate or fruits. Sky’s the limit!
- ii. **Pro Tip:** Save your “schnibbles” from your cheese slicing earlier to try with your sides (this is my favorite part). There is a science behind sensory, but your own tastebuds are the best tools you have here! Go with your gut and try new combos—you might just hit the jackpot!



SOME OF MY FAVORITE, GO-TO PAIRINGS:

- Fresh Chevre with Cranberries & Cinnamon
- Blue Cheese with Honey & Walnuts
- Brie with Pepper Jelly
- Sharp Cheddar with Apple
- Gouda with Toffee Peanuts
- Garlic Cheddar with Pickles