

## A MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

### FARMHOUSE CHEESE AND CRAFT BEER TASTING NOTES



## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
About Irish Farmhouse Cheese .....	3
About Irish Craft Beer.....	3
Matching Irish Farmhouse Cheese and Irish Craft Beer .....	4
General Matching Tips .....	4
Tips on Choosing, Serving and Tasting Beer .....	4
Choosing Your Beer .....	4
Serving your beer .....	5
Tasting beer .....	5
Tips on Buying, Storing, Serving and Tasting Cheese .....	5
Choosing Your Cheese .....	5
Storing Your Cheese .....	6
Serving Your Cheese .....	6
Tasting Cheese .....	6
Beer and Cheese Pairing.....	7
Cheese Styles.....	7
Soft and Semi-Soft Cheeses .....	7
Hard Cheeses .....	8
Blue Cheese.....	8
Smoked and Flavoured Cheese .....	8
Goat's Milk Cheese .....	8
Sheep's Milk Cheese .....	9
Buffalo Milk Cheese .....	9
Beer Styles.....	10
Lager / Pilsner: .....	10
Wheat Beer .....	10
Blonde / Golden Ale .....	10
Pale Ale .....	10
American Pale Ale .....	11
IPA .....	11
Double IPA .....	11
Red Ale .....	11
Stout/Porter .....	12
Strong Ale / Barley Wine:.....	12
Sour / Farmhouse Ale .....	12
Cheat Sheet .....	13

## INTRODUCTION

We're very lucky here in Ireland to have two wonderful complementary industries in farmhouse cheese and craft beer, whose products can be paired together for the simplest of snacks, a delicious meal or even for a dedicating tasting session to wow your senses.

Irish craft beer and farmhouse cheeses are linked by having the very simplest of ingredients which are transformed in the hands of the brewers and the cheesemakers, and through the fermentation process, to give us products which reflect the characters of the makers, the ingredients, and the landscape.

It is often said of pairing food and drinks that *what grows together goes together* and this is most certainly the case with our beers and cheeses here in Ireland.

## ABOUT IRISH FARMHOUSE CHEESE

Through the ages Ireland had a strong history of cheesemaking as attested to in various monastic records, and some even say that Irish monks brought cheesemaking to parts of Europe. For a variety of reasons, the rich culture of small-scale cheese making was subsequently lost in Ireland until its revival in the late 1970s. Ireland diverged from our European neighbours who have a tradition of territorial cheeses (types of cheese that are linked entirely a geographical location), such as Stilton in England, Comté in France or the Italian Parmigiano Reggiano which are all made in one locality by a variety of producers.

In Ireland, unbound by traditions and norms, a new wave of farmhouse cheeses were born with the revival of cheese making where the individual styles of cheeses are linked both to the people who make them and their place, with no expectations of a particular style. This means we have a whole host of unique cheese types available in Ireland. Beyond the traditional cow's milk we also have lots of goat and sheep's milk cheeses and even cheese from recently introduced Irish buffalo herds.

The quality of Irish milk and the land on which the animals graze plays a huge part in the resulting quality of Irish farmhouse cheeses which rightfully hold pride of place in the now thriving Irish food scene. It is estimated that more than 200 different farmhouse cheeses are produced by 70 cheese makers in Ireland.

## ABOUT IRISH CRAFT BEER

Beer equally has a long history in Ireland, with the earliest recorded brewing going back over five thousand years, and the stories of beer and brewing continuing throughout our history - from the ale miracle of St Brigid, through the 17th century 'alewives' brewing for the home and onto the mass commercialisation of brewing in the 19th century. For most of the twentieth century a few big brands dominated the Irish beer market, with many local and regional breweries being subsumed by these big breweries, until a resurgence of small-scale craft brewing began at the end of the century. Breweries like Porterhouse and O'Hara's ushered in the new wave of craft brewing which grew greatly in the 2010s.

The Irish craft beer scene has been thriving in the last decade, with small breweries all over the country making beers in many varieties of styles and with a huge array of flavour profiles which give far greater scope in finding the perfect beer for you, or to match with foods.

## MATCHING IRISH FARMHOUSE CHEESE AND IRISH CRAFT BEER

---

### GENERAL MATCHING TIPS

Matching food and drink can bring a great deal of enjoyment, and while often it is a case of balancing – matching the weight and strength so that neither overpowers the other - it can also be good to work with contrasting as well as complementary flavours. With some consideration you can create a match where the sum of both parts create something better together than they do individually. The fun is in the trying - sometimes when a match shouldn't technically work but the company, the ambiance and even the weather can play a part in your overall enjoyment!

Beer and Cheese are natural counterparts to each other – the beer's carbonation cuts through the richness of the cheese and cleanses the palate, while bitterness can cut through the fat and creaminess of the cheese. The grain base of the beer contributes sweetness similar to the flavours coming through from the milk of the animals who also fed on these grains or grasses. Irish craft beers and farmhouse cheeses, both made with a few simple ingredients using processes that came to us from ancient times, reflect the characters of their makers - the brewers and cheesemakers, who each make them something unique that reflects the land from which their ingredients came.

There are a many guidance points to help you discover a perfect match, but bear in mind that rules are meant to be broken and a lot of the fun of a tasting is playing around and discovering what works best for you. As everyone's palates are different and people appreciate flavours in a different way don't limit yourself and remember that the match that makes you happiest is always the best one.

### TIPS ON CHOOSING, SERVING AND TASTING BEER

---

#### CHOOSING YOUR BEER

Along with the growth of the craft beer industry there's been a growth of the range available on the shelves which can leave many people overwhelmed when choosing beers. Specialist retailers are great for guidance and usually have a wealth of knowledge around the brands they stock. Taking the time to talk through what you like or don't like, not just in beer but in other drinks and foods can give a retailer the clues needed to guide you to a beer that suits you. Big, hop forward bitter IPA flavours are one person's dream but another's nightmare. A red wine drinker might prefer the fruity, biscuity flavours of a red ale or the fuller flavours of a stout to this – again, it comes back to your own palate and taste preferences.

In the absence of guidance, a good place to start is with your local brewery, you will likely find local beers to be readily available in local outlets and if not, you should ask! Using some of the style guides and cheat sheet included here you should be able to find a beer that suits you, whether that be hoppy, bitter, malty, biscuity, tart or rich and full flavoured.

When deciding on whether to go for bottle or canned beer, again it can come down to personal preference and what is available to you. Light affects beers, so craft beer bottles are generally brown to eliminate the risk of sunlight affecting the beer. Cans eliminate light totally, thus removing the risk associated with this. Bottle conditioned beer will have undergone a secondary fermentation process in the bottle and will contain a yeast sediment. Cans are often the preference for very hoppy beers, as the hop flavour is quite volatile and the can keeps the hop flavour fresher. Generally, hoppy beers are at their best when fresher while stronger or darker beers can improve with age. Growlers are becoming popular now, which is a take-out serve of draught beer in

a reusable container. Lots of off licences and pubs are now offering this as a dispense method and it is often a way to try out new or unusual beers, as beers served from growler stations are not always available in can or bottle formats.

---

## SERVING YOUR BEER

Glassware should be clean (avoid using detergent for washing beer glasses) and although there are certain styles of glassware which pair well to certain beers play around with what you have to hand and what works for you. A hoppy IPA can be great in a stemmed wine glass, a stout or porter in a brandy glass, a crisp lager in a tumbler etc. If you are tasting a variety of beers and cheeses, and especially in a group setting, you will be taking small serves from a single bottle or can so smaller glasses can work better.

As with cheese, beer should be served at an appropriate temperature for its style, and for a tasting should not be too cold as this diminishes the flavour. Most beers will have a recommended serving temperature on the packaging, but generally lighter beers can be served cooler so pop them in the fridge for an hour before pouring, while darker and stronger beers are best served at 'cellar temperature' (about 12°C) or above.

---

## TASTING BEER

We taste with more than our mouth, and it is important to use your other senses as well. Tasting beer correctly can be broken down into four sections:

**Look** – after pouring your beer take a look at it in the glass. Hold it up to the light, is it clear or cloudy, are there colours coming through you weren't expecting, does it have a head?

**Smell** – when pouring, leave room in your glass to be able to give the beer a swirl and smell it at a slight distance before getting your nose down to it. Many off flavours can be detected by smelling the beer, but you also want to get a sense of the flavours you are about to experience, be they juicy tropical fruit flavours of new world hops in an IPA or the plummy fruitiness of a Barley Wine.

**Drink** – beer is always swallowed when tasting, never spat out like wine, because the back area of the tongue is where bitterness is perceived more intensely, while the sides are more sensitive to sourness. Often when tasting you will perceive the sweeter, fruitier flavours initially which are followed up with the bitterness. Alongside flavour, mouthfeel is also considered when tasting so consider traits such as whether it's light or full bodied, the carbonation, smoothness and texture of the beer.

**Savour** – after tasting take a moment to savour the flavour, consider any after flavours and the 'length' or how long the flavours lingers.

## TIPS ON BUYING, STORING, SERVING AND TASTING CHEESE

---

### CHOOSING YOUR CHEESE

There's a huge array of Irish farmhouse cheeses available to suit all tastes. Buying from a shop where a fresh cut service is available can be a major part of the experience, along with interacting with the knowledgeable staff and having the possibility of tasting. Ideally buy cheese from a specialist cheesemonger, independent grocer or a specialist deli counter at your local supermarket.

---

### KEY TIPS

Don't be afraid to ask for advice.

Buy little and often – maturing the cheese is the job of the cheese-makers and sellers.

Try new styles, especially when matching with beers.

## STORING YOUR CHEESE

In the vegetable compartment of a refrigerator is usually the best place to store cheese.

Ideally cheese should be wrapped in cheese paper or greaseproof paper, but tin foil also works well for blue cheese. A Tupperware box to store the cheese can be great so that if it is delicate it does not become affected by any other items stored alongside.

If you are lucky enough to have a cool larder this is a great place to store harder cheeses, but softer and blue cheeses do need to be refrigerated.

## SERVING YOUR CHEESE

The rule of thumb is that cheeses should be out of the refrigerator at least a little while before serving. To keep things simple, you can stick to this rule and make sure to take the cheese out and unwrap it up to an hour before serving. If you want the absolute best experience though, here's a few further things to consider:

Soft cheeses shouldn't be too warm – depending on the temperature in your home, a general guidance would be 30 minutes out of the fridge, while harder and firm cheeses may benefit from a little longer, maybe 1 to 2 hours. In the cheese world this is called "*to chambré the cheese*". An important note is that room temperature is not always what we consider it to be - central heating and sunny days can see room temperature rise in excess of 25°C and general advice on room temperature/serving temperature has mainly been based on around 18° – 22°C. If you take your soft and hard cheeses out to *chambré* (bring up to room temperature) at the same time and the room temperature is very high, it might be that your soft cheese will simply melt, and your hard cheese will sweat.

Another important thing is that if you have a large amount of cheese and feel that you won't eat it at this sitting – take out just what you think you'll need. Taking your cheese in and out of the fridge and changing its temperature repeatedly will deteriorate its quality.

In terms of presentation, a wooden board or slate makes a beautiful and practical way to serve the cheese. If you have a large board, it works great for multiple cheeses, but if you have several cheeses it may be a good idea to use a separate board or plate for each. A sharp knife is essential and a separate knife for each cheese is best to avoid contamination and to minimise mess when serving.

## TASTING CHEESE

Visually, the cheese should not show any particular discolouration and should have some sort of consistency; brownish marks are potentially an indicator of cheese that is past its best.

To taste like a pro, first smell the cheese – in the interior and then near the rind. Taste a small amount from the interior first before moving to a little near the rind or including the rind. Aerate your mouth as you taste and savour the flavours.

---

## SHOULD YOU EAT THE RIND?

This can be a personal preference in many cases. If you don't want to eat the rind – don't!

To give a rough general guidance though, rinds on hard cheeses are more of a protective coating whether natural or waxed and are not meant to be eaten, while soft cheese rinds are mainly considered to be an integral part of the cheeses and you might be missing out on the whole flavour experience if you don't eat it.

## BEER AND CHEESE PAIRING

If you're trying a few pairings always try and start milder or lighter and work your way up to the stronger flavours, so as not to overwhelm your palate. Whether you taste the cheese first and follow with the beer or vice versa may depend on your own allegiances, but a good idea is to try and have a taste of each separately before combining them, to see in what way the match works in changing the overall flavour profile. Do make sure to take a few seconds to savour the flavours in your mouth and bring in a little air if possible.

What you serve your cheese with can also have an effect on the overall match, so think about whether your cheese should be on a light cracker, some brown bread or a wheat biscuit. Before moving on from one pairing to another it is a good idea to cleanse the palate, and a plain dry cracker or some neutral crispy bread does the job well for this.

## CHEESE STYLES

There's lots of different ways to categorise Irish farmhouse cheeses:

By their milk type - cows, sheep's goat's, buffalo

By texture - hard, soft, semi-soft

By rind – bloomy or washed, natural or coated

By flavour - mild and delicate right up to pungent

Here we've broken it down into some of the most available styles produced in Ireland which hopefully will help you easily identify the type of cheese you're buying to match with craft beer.

---

## SOFT AND SEMI-SOFT CHEESES

---

### FRESH AND SOFT CHEESES

These are milky and delicate cheeses which don't have a rind, cream cheese would fall into this style for example. Generally mild in flavour so need a subtler pairing.

---

### SEMI-SOFT BLOOMY RIND

These are semi-soft cheeses with a white rind in the style of Brie and Camembert. They can be made from any milk type but most commonly in Ireland are made from cows or goat's milk. They fall into a category called surface ripened cheeses which means that they ripen from the outside in. That's why you will see that they are usually softest and creamiest near the rind and a little firmer right in the centre. This type of cheese is a very versatile match with a variety of beer styles.

---

## **SEMI-SOFT WASHED RIND (OFTEN PUNGENT, ORANGEY-COLOURED, RINDED CHEESES)**

Generally semi-soft in texture, though they can be firmer these are earthy and aromatic cheeses.

Stronger cheese style can be difficult to pair with other beverages like wines and is where beers can really come in to their own, try with an IPA or pale ale where the hops and fruit can balance the stronger styles of cheese.

---

## **HARD CHEESES**

---

### **CHEDDAR**

Cheddar is a style of hard cheese with a slightly open or “crumbly” texture.

**YOUNGER CHEDDAR** is usually a more uncomplicated style, with a little more elasticity in texture where the flavours are likely to not overpower their matches.

**STRONG MATURE CHEDDAR** is a firmer, more “sharp” style of cheese. Usually it would be aged for close to a year or more and there are some great farmhouse examples in Ireland.

---

### **OTHER HARD CHEESES (GOUDA OR ALPINE STYLE)**

There's a wide variety of Irish farmhouse cheeses in the Gouda style – this is a sweet, nutty and creamy style of cheese and can vary from younger and simpler styles to much more pronounced flavours in longer aged versions. Irish Gouda styles are available in all milk types. You can generally identify a Gouda style cheese by its rounded edges.

---

### **BLUE CHEESE**

There are some very mild examples in Ireland, but most have a significant strong flavour – softer versions are usually a little milder and more buttery whereas harder blues in Ireland tend to be a bit stronger. While they are available in different milk types, because of the unique flavour of the blue mould this is the flavour we try and match with beer.

---

### **SMOKED AND FLAVOURED CHEESE**

Any cheese can be smoked, but mostly in Ireland our smoked cheeses are hard cheddar types, but there are some washed rind and also harder goat's cheeses available smoked. Generally here one looks to match the smoky flavour with the beer rather than the cheese type. The same applies in the case of cheeses with flavours added, unless the flavours are extremely subtle. There are a host of soft and hard cheeses with flavours from honey and thyme right up to fiery chilli added in and lots in between.

---

### **GOAT'S MILK CHEESE**

These range from young and fresh – a wide variety of this type is produced in Ireland to bloomy rind versions to harder cheeses, most often in the Gouda style



You can use the suggestions for the types based on texture and rind above, but a goat's milk cheeses from mild to strong are quite versatile as beer matches.

---

## **SHEEP'S MILK CHEESE**

Softer younger styles are usually quite mild, though rich in texture. Firmer and aged styles are meatier yet fudgy and sweet. As sheep's milk cheeses usually have a particularly rich mouthfeel they pair best with richer/fuller styles of beer.

---

## **BUFFALO MILK CHEESE**

Although harder styles of buffalo's milk cheeses are available, the most widely available style is softer creamy cheese and mozzarella. These are delicately flavoured cheeses but with a hint of savoury richness. Best paired with a lighter style of Pale Ale



---

### LAGER / PILSNER:

Crisp and refreshing, generally light-coloured beer with a hop presence which can range from low to mild floral and fruity flavours.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: A CRISP DRY WHITE WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** Milder bloomy-rind cheeses and soft fresh cheeses from all types of milk match well. Can also be a good match for some very mild harder cheeses such as young Gouda style cheeses from cow's milk and goat's milk.

---

### WHEAT BEER

From pale yellow to dark gold in colour, wheat beers generally have a distinctive fluffy head. Hop aromas are low but they classic fruity esters of banana and clove are generally present.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: SWEETER WHITE OR ROSÉ WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** Strongly flavoured goat's milk cheeses are a particularly good match here, or try a mature hard sheep's cheese.

---

### BLONDE / GOLDEN ALE

Mid strength golden coloured ale with good malt flavours and medium hop bitterness.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: A FULLER FLAVOURED WHITE WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** Works great with the stronger more mature bloomy rind cheeses and milder styles of washed rind cheese. Can work very well as a contrasting flavour with smoked cheese

---

### PALE ALE

Originally an English style of beer, pale ale can generally indicate a mid-strength, moderately hopped beer which can encompass a wide span of varieties. For a lighter take on the style, look out for 'session pale ale' which indicates a lower alcohol content.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: A FULLER FLAVOURED WHITE WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** As this is quite a broad category, the best match can be variable, but depending on the type and weight of beer, a mid strength cheese works well – think of milder hard cheeses including Cheddars and younger sheep's milk cheeses.

Buffalo cheese tends to fit very well as a match in this category.

---

## AMERICAN PALE ALE

A full flavoured pale ale which has a lot of big citrusy hop flavours but generally not too bitter. A little higher in ABV, usually about the 5-5.5% mark.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: A FULLER FLAVOURED WHITE WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** *Works very well with a creamy style of soft or bloomy-rinded cheese and can also be an excellent accompaniment to alpine style cheeses (Emmental or Swiss style hard cheese). Piquant mature cheeses from all milk types also pair well because of the big rich flavours.*

---

## IPA

A broad term, but generally an IPA (India Pale Ale) is moderately strong (5-7% ABV), fairly full bodied ale with a strong hop flavour and assertive bitterness. Many variants of the style are emerging, such as NEIPA which is an unfiltered, hazy take on the style.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: FULL BODIED WHITE WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** STRONG GOAT'S CHEESE, SOFT OR HARD, AND ALSO STRONGER STYLES OF HARD CHEESES ACROSS THE BOARD SUCH AS AN EXTRA MATURE CHEDDAR.

---

## DOUBLE IPA

A descendant of the American IPA, a double IPA is higher in alcohol (7%+ ABV) and has big flavours to match with a complex maltiness, hoppier flavour and a lot more bitterness than an IPA.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: FULL BODIED WINE OR STRONG FULL FLAVOURED COCKTAILS

**CHEESE PAIRING:** THIS IS A GREAT MATCH FOR A CREAMY SWEET STYLE OF BLUE CHEESE OR A STRONG CHEDDAR OR AGED GOUDA STYLE CHEESE

---

## RED ALE

Similar to an amber ale, this style of beer is red in colour and generally has a low hop bitterness and has a malty profile with toasted and toffee flavours which come through from the toasted malts used in the brewing.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: A GOOD ALTERNATIVE TO A MEDIUM BODIED RED WINE

**CHEESE PAIRING:** RED ALES ARE WONDERFUL WITH AGED CHEDDARS OR SEMI SOFT, RIND WASHED CHEESE OR A HARD SHEEP'S MILK CHEESE. RED ALE IS A VERSATILE BEER FOR MATCHING, AND A RICHER OR HOPPIER STYLE OF RED ALE CAN WORK WITH SMOKED OR A VARIETY OF FLAVOUR ADDED CHEESES

---

## STOUT/PORTER

Dark in colour with lots of roasted, chocolatey and coffee-like flavours, generally with a low hop bitterness. Styles can range from dry to quite sweet, with porter generally being lighter in body and less dry than stout.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: FULL BODIED RED WINES, VANILLA OR CHOCOLATEY LIQUOURS

**CHEESE PAIRING:** TRY WITH ALL TYPES OF BLUE CHEESE. MILD, SWEET GOAT'S CHEESE CAN BE A GOOD CONTRAST WITH A CHOCOLATEY STOUT. LONG AGED GOUDA, WITH ITS AGED BISCUITY AND TOFFEE FLAVOURS CAN BE SUPERB.

SMOKED CHEESES PAIR GREAT WITH ROASTY STYLES.

---

## STRONG ALE / BARLEY WINE

Dark in colour and rich in flavour, these beers are usually at the higher end of the strength scale, medium to full bodied and generally over 8% ABV they have intense malty and fruity flavours. Often released as seasonal or one off beers, also look out for terms like Imperial or Tripel.

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: Port or dark spirits such as rum or brandy

**CHEESE PAIRING:** *This can be a fantastic match with aged cheddars and piquant hard cheeses as well as blue cheese. Can contrast well with stronger softer goat's cheeses.*

---

## SOUR / FARMHOUSE ALE

Sour beers have an intentionally acidic, tart or sour flavour. Traditional styles include Saison, Gose / Geuze, Lambics, Wild beers and Berliner Weisse but new takes on the style mean that any type of beer can appear as a sour.

---

ALTERNATIVE DRINK TO: SAISONS CAN MAKE A GREAT ALTERNATIVE TO SPARKLING WINE, GOSE TO A GIN AND TONIC, OLD BEERS TO A SHERRY OR PORT.

**CHEESE PAIRING:** WORKS WELL WITH AGED SHEEP'S CHEESE OR PIQUANT CHEDDAR, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF CONTRAST WITH A REALLY CREAMY SOFT CHEESE STYLE



## CHEAT SHEET

Light beers such as lagers pair best with milder and soft cheeses

Hoppy beers such as IPAs pair best with fuller flavoured goat or sheep's cheese, or hard cheeses

Malty beers such as red ales pair best with fuller flavoured nutty hard cheeses

Dark Beers, stouts and porters work well with strong hard cheeses or blues

Strong Beers need very full flavoured robust cheeses