

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Cheese boards, crackers, chutneys, baked cheese and party bites

6 Chapters

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Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Chapter 1 · Know Your Cheese

SKILL GOAL

Choose, store, cut and serve cheese properly, and build a balanced board.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Cheese is milk that has been set into curds and then drained, salted and often aged. There are hundreds of kinds, but you only need a handful of **families** to build a good board or choose the right cheese for cooking. This chapter is about **choosing, storing, cutting and serving**. The rest of the course is what goes with it.

The families

FAMILY	EXAMPLES	CHARACTER	GOOD FOR
Fresh	Mozzarella, ricotta, cream cheese, cottage cheese, feta, fresh goat's cheese	Soft, mild, milky or tangy	Salads, dips, spreading, melting (mozzarella)
Soft, white rind	Brie, camembert	Creamy, mushroomy, earthy	Boards; baked (see chapter 4)
Semi-hard	Edam, gouda, Red Leicester, Wensleydale	Mild to nutty, easy to slice	Sandwiches, boards, melting
Hard	Mature cheddar, parmesan-style, gruyère, Comté	Sharp, nutty, crumbly	Boards, grating, sauces
Blue	Stilton, gorgonzola, Danish blue, roquefort	Strong, salty, sharp	A small piece on a board; in sauces and dressings
Washed rind	Taleggio, Munster	Pungent smell, mild-to-meaty taste	Boards; melting

Buying

- **Ask to taste.** A cheese counter will let you try, and can advise.
- **Buy small amounts,** especially of soft cheese, which keeps for days rather than weeks.
- **Look for good cheese:** no cracks, slime, or dried-out edges. A white rind should look like a soft bloom, not grey or sticky.
- **Check the label** for pasteurised or unpasteurised ('raw milk') if you cook for anyone pregnant or otherwise at risk, and for vegetarian rennet if needed.

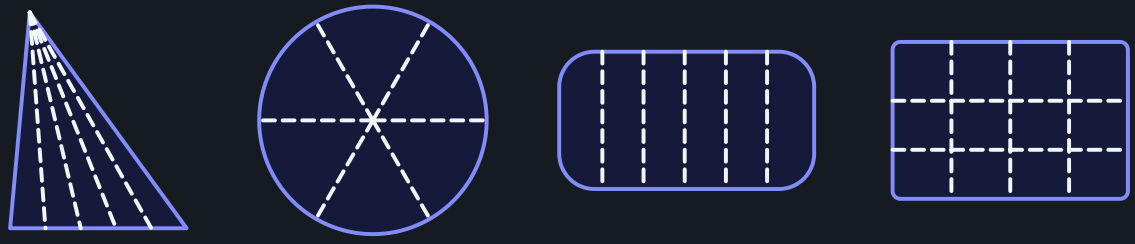
Storing

- **In the fridge,** in the salad drawer or a covered box. Cold slows the ageing and keeps it safe.
- **Wrap in baking paper or wax paper,** then loosely in a bag or box. Cheese needs to breathe. Cling film left on for days can make cheese sweaty and ammonia-smelling.
- **Keep strong cheeses apart** (blue, washed-rind) so they don't flavour the others.
- **Hard cheese** keeps for weeks; soft cheese, a few days; fresh cheese, until the date on the pack and then a few days after opening (follow the pack).
- **Freezing:** grated hard cheese and cheese for cooking freeze fine, and go crumbly when thawed. Don't freeze cheese for a board.

> MOULD
>
> **Mould:** a little surface mould on a hard cheese can be cut off generously (at least 2 cm around and below it), keeping the knife out of the mould. Throw away soft, crumbly, grated or sliced cheese with mould, and cheese that smells of ammonia or has gone slimy. This is general advice, not a UK rule I have checked. Blue cheese is meant to be blue: its own mould is safe to eat.

Serving

- **Take it out 30 to 60 minutes before serving** (soft cheese needs about 30 minutes, hard cheese closer to an hour). Cold cheese is dull and firm; room-temperature cheese is full of flavour.
- **Keep it covered with an upturned bowl or a damp cloth** until you serve it so it doesn't dry out.
- **One knife for each cheese,** so flavours and mould don't travel.
- **Eat from mild to strong.**



Wedge
slice from the point

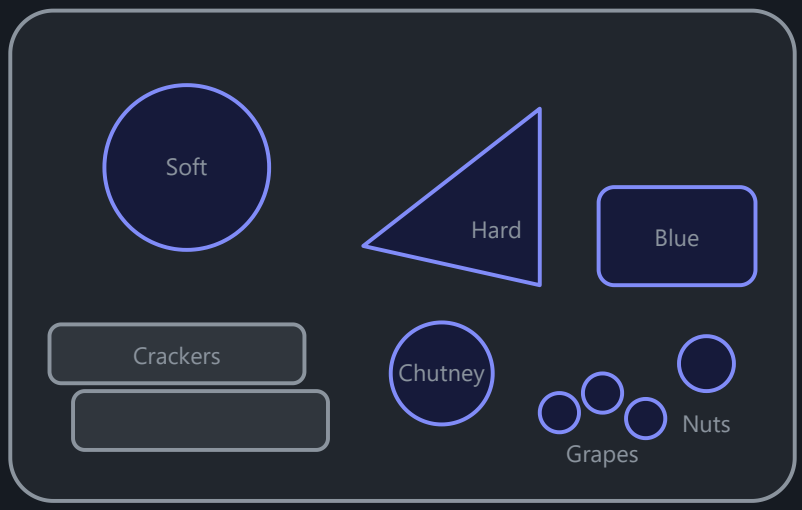
Round (brie)
cut like a pie

Log (goat)
slice into rounds

Hard block
thin slices or chunks

Figure 1. Cut each shape so that every guest gets some rind and some of the middle. A wedge is sliced from the point, a round like a pie, a log into rounds.

Building a board



One knife for each cheese
Mild to strong, clockwise

Something sweet (chutney, fruit)
Something crunchy (crackers, nuts)
Something fresh (grapes, celery)

Pregnancy: label which cheeses are pasteurised or hard, and which are not

Figure 2. A simple board: three cheeses from mild to strong, with something sweet, something crunchy and something fresh. Leave space so nothing is crowded.

- **Three or four cheeses** is plenty: a hard, a soft, a blue or washed-rind, and something mild.
- **Add contrast:** sweet (chutney, honey, fruit), crunchy (crackers, nuts), fresh (grapes, celery, apple) and salty or sharp (pickles).
- **Leave space** so people can reach and cut.
- **Quantities:** allow roughly 50 to 100 g of cheese per person on a board with other food, a little more if it is the main part of the meal (a general guide, not a rule).

Cheese is a treat

Cheese is rich in calcium and protein, but it is also high in saturated fat and salt. Enjoy it, in smaller amounts, with plenty of fruit and vegetables, and choose strongly flavoured cheeses, because a little goes further.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A simple two-cheese board

10 minutes plus 30 minutes at room temperature | 2 portions

choosing contrasts and serving at the right temperature

Two cheeses that contrast (one hard and sharp, one soft and mild), with something sweet and something crunchy. Everything else in the course builds on this.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

60 g	a hard cheese (mature cheddar or similar)
60 g	a soft cheese (a pasteurised goat's cheese, or a mild creamy cheese)
1 handful	crackers (shop-bought for now)
1 handful	grapes
1 tbsp	chutney or honey

1. Take the cheeses out of the fridge **30 to 45 minutes** before serving, still wrapped, so they warm up and their flavour comes out.
2. Put them on a board or plate, apart, with a separate knife for each. Cut a few slices from the hard cheese so people can start.
3. Add the crackers, grapes and a spoonful of chutney or honey in a small dish.
4. Eat in order from the mildest to the strongest, tasting each cheese on its own first.

> **PREGNANCY**
>
> **Pregnancy and cheese:** the NHS advice, as I found it, is that pregnant women can eat **hard cheeses** (cheddar, parmesan, gruyère, even unpasteurised, and hard blue-veined cheese such as stilton) and **pasteurised** soft cheeses such as mozzarella, feta, ricotta, cottage cheese, cream cheese, halloumi and paneer. They should avoid **mould-ripened soft cheeses with a white rind** (brie, camembert, chèvre), **soft blue cheeses** (Danish blue, gorgonzola, roquefort) and **any unpasteurised soft cheese**, unless these have been **cooked until steaming hot all the way through**. The worry is listeria, which can harm an unborn baby. Pâté (including vegetable pâté) and some cold meats carry their own advice. The NHS pages are updated from time to time, so check the current list at nhs.uk if it matters to you.

LEVEL 1 · PRACTICE

Fruit-and-cheese plate

15 minutes | 1 portion | cutting fruit and cheese into bite-sized pieces

The healthiest way to do cheese: a small amount of cheese with plenty of fresh fruit and crunchy vegetables. Cheese is rich and salty, so a little goes a long way.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	apple
1	pear
1	celery stick
80 g	cheddar or other hard cheese
1 tsp	honey
1 handful	walnuts or almonds (optional)

1. Core the apple and pear and cut each into thin wedges. A squeeze of lemon stops them browning (see Cooking Skills: Vegetables 2, chapter 8).
2. Cut the celery into short sticks and the cheese into thin slices or small chunks.
3. Arrange on a plate with the honey and nuts.

> **A LIGHTER BOARD**
>
> Fruit, celery, carrot sticks and cucumber on a board mean smaller portions of cheese and crackers, and more of your five a day.

LEVEL 2 · TASTE

A tasting flight

30 minutes | 2 to 4 portions | tasting cheese attentively

A tasting teaches you more about cheese than any description. Taste from mild to strong, and take notes in the tasting-notes table.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4 × 30 g	cheeses of different types, about 30 g each (for example mozzarella or feta, a hard cheese, a semi-hard cheese, and a mild blue or washed-rind cheese)
1	plain cracker or bread, to cleanse the palate
1	glass of water

1. Take the cheeses out of the fridge 30 to 45 minutes ahead. Arrange them mild to strong on a board, labelled.
2. For each cheese, **look** (colour, rind, holes), **smell**, **feel** the texture with your fingers, then **taste** a small piece and let it melt.
3. Between cheeses, have a sip of water and a bite of plain cracker.
4. Write down what you noticed: salty, sweet, nutty, tangy, creamy, crumbly, sharp.

> **CHECK WHO IS EATING**
>
> **Pregnancy and cheese:** the NHS advice, as I found it, is that pregnant women can eat **hard cheeses** (cheddar, parmesan, gruyère, even unpasteurised, and hard blue-veined cheese such as stilton) and **pasteurised** soft cheeses such as mozzarella, feta, ricotta, cottage cheese, cream cheese, halloumi and paneer. They should avoid **mould-ripened soft cheeses with a white rind** (brie, camembert, chèvre), **soft blue cheeses** (Danish blue, gorgonzola, roquefort) and **any unpasteurised soft cheese**, unless these have been **cooked until steaming hot all the way through**. The worry is listeria, which can harm an unborn baby. Pâté (including vegetable pâté) and some cold meats carry their own advice. The NHS pages are updated from time to time, so check the current list at nhs.uk if it matters to you.
>
> **Other people at higher risk:** listeria is also more dangerous for older people, babies and anyone with a weakened immune system. If you are cooking for them, the same cautions about

> unpasteurised and soft ripened cheese are sensible. I haven't checked the current Food Standards Agency wording for each group, so look there if you need the detail.

LEVEL 3 · BUILD

A board for six

25 minutes plus time to warm up | 6 portions | building a balanced board

Four cheeses, five accompaniments, and a layout that works. As a rough guide, allow 50 to 100 g of cheese per person on a board with other food, and more if it is the main event.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

- **1 piece, about 40 g** mild cheese
- **1 piece, about 40 g** medium cheese
- **1 piece, about 40 g** strong cheese or a hard blue
- **1 piece, about 40 g** soft cheese, pasteurised
- **1** pear or apple
- **1 handful** grapes
- **1 handful** crackers
- **1 tbsp** chutney or jam
- **1 handful** nuts (check allergies)

1. Take the cheeses out of the fridge 30 to 45 minutes ahead. Cut a few pieces from the hard cheese and leave the others whole with their own knives.
2. Place the cheeses on the board first, well spaced, mild to strong in a clockwise order (see the diagram).
3. Fill the gaps with the fruit, nuts and a bowl of chutney, then fan the crackers in two or three groups.
4. Label the cheeses with small cards, including a note of which are pasteurised or hard, so guests who need to avoid some can choose.

> **ALLERGENS AND VEGETARIANS**
>
> **Vegetarian cheese:** many traditional hard cheeses (including parmesan and some cheddars) are made with animal rennet. If you are cooking for a vegetarian, look for a label that says vegetarian or uses microbial or vegetable rennet.

> **Allergens:** milk, gluten (crackers) and nuts are the usual ones on a board. Ask guests, and use a separate dish for nuts.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Fridge or room temperature

The same cheese, two temperatures.

1. Cut two pieces from the same cheese. Taste one straight from the fridge. Leave the other for 45 minutes at room temperature, then taste it.

Look for: The warm piece is creamier and has much more flavour. This is why cheese is taken out of the fridge before serving.

EXPERIMENT

Wrapped two ways

Cling film or paper.

1. Cut a block of cheddar in two. Wrap one half in cling film and the other in baking paper, loosely in a bag, and keep both in the fridge for a week.

Look for: The cling-film one may be sweaty or taste slightly stale; the paper-wrapped one stays fresher. See which you prefer.

EXPERIMENT

Slice thickness

Thin or thick.

1. Cut thin slices (2 mm) and thick slices (5 mm) of the same hard cheese and taste them with a cracker.

Look for: Thin slices melt on the tongue and let the flavour through; thick slices are chewier. Notice how cut changes the experience.

EXPERIMENT

Pairing

Which partner suits which cheese?

1. Taste a mild cheese and a strong cheese with each of: plain cracker, honey, chutney, apple, grapes.

Look for: Sweet partners soften strong cheese; fresh fruit lifts rich cheese. Write down your best matches.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Two-cheese board				
Fruit-and-cheese plate				
Tasting flight: cheese 1				
Tasting flight: cheese 2				
Tasting flight: cheese 3				
Tasting flight: cheese 4				
Board for six				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Fridge vs room temperature				
Cling film vs paper				
Pairings				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Cheese tastes dull	Served too cold	Take it out 30 to 60 minutes before serving
Cheese is sweaty or ammonia-smelling	Wrapped too tightly for too long	Rewrap in paper; cut off the outer layer if the smell is strong; if it is very bad, throw it away
Dry, cracked edges	Left uncovered	Cut off the dry edge; wrap properly
Board looks messy	Everything crowded	Space it out; cut a few pieces to start
Strong flavours mixed up	One knife for all	Use one knife per cheese
Cheese left out too long	Forgotten on the table	Put it back in the fridge after about 2 hours; throw it away if it has been out all day

CHEESE SAFETY

Pregnancy and cheese: the NHS advice, as I found it, is that pregnant women can eat **hard cheeses** (cheddar, parmesan, gruyère, even unpasteurised, and hard blue-veined cheese such as stilton) and **pasteurised** soft cheeses such as mozzarella, feta, ricotta, cottage cheese, cream cheese, halloumi and paneer. They should avoid **mould-ripened soft cheeses with a white rind** (brie, camembert, chèvre), **soft blue cheeses** (Danish blue, gorgonzola, roquefort) and **any unpasteurised soft cheese**, unless these have been **cooked until steaming hot all the way through**. The worry is listeria, which can harm an unborn baby. Pâté (including vegetable pâté) and some cold meats carry their own advice. The NHS pages are updated from time to time, so check the current list at nhs.uk if it matters to you.

Other people at higher risk: listeria is also more dangerous for older people, babies and anyone with a weakened immune system. If you are cooking for them, the same cautions about unpasteurised and soft ripened cheese are sensible. I haven't checked the current Food Standards Agency wording for each group, so look there if you need the detail.

How long can it stand out? Cheese tastes best near room temperature, but don't leave a board out all day. A cautious rule of thumb is to put it back in the fridge after about **2 hours** (less in a warm room). That figure is a common food-safety habit, not a rule I have confirmed for UK guidance.

Knife safety: cut on a stable board (a damp cloth underneath), tuck your guiding fingertips back (the claw), and cut round or slippery vegetables on a flat face so they can't roll. A sharp knife is safer than a blunt one. Never catch a falling knife. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1 covers all of this.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know the main cheese families and what each is good for.
- ☐ I can store cheese properly and know what to do about mould.
- ☐ I take cheese out of the fridge in time and serve it with separate knives.
- ☐ I can build a balanced board.
- ☐ I know the pregnancy and higher-risk cautions for soft and unpasteurised cheese.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 2 is Crackers and Crispbreads: rolling, baking and flavouring crackers.

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Chapter 2 · Crackers and Crispbreads

SKILL GOAL

Make crisp crackers and crispbreads at home, and cheese straws from ready-rolled pastry.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Homemade crackers are cheaper than shop ones, taste of what you put in them, and are much easier than most people expect. The dough is just flour, fat, salt and water, rolled thin and baked until crisp. The skill is in the **rolling and the baking time**.

The dough

INGREDIENT	JOB
Flour	The structure. Plain flour gives a light cracker, wholemeal a nutty, denser one.
Fat (oil or butter)	Tenderness. More fat gives a shorter, crumbly cracker; less gives a crisper, harder one.
Salt	Flavour. Crackers need more salt than you'd expect.
Water	Brings the dough together. Use just enough: a stiff dough rolls thinner.
Extras	Seeds, herbs, spices, grated cheese, black pepper, oats.

Rolling thin

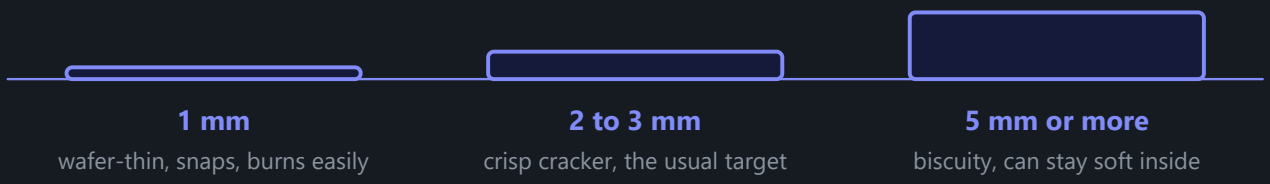


Figure 3. Thickness decides the result. Roll as thin as you can and aim for 2 to 3 mm; thicker crackers can stay soft in the middle.

- **Rest the dough** for 10 to 15 minutes so it relaxes and rolls out without springing back.
- **Roll between baking paper** for very thin crackers: nothing sticks and you don't need extra flour.
- **Roll as thin as you can,** aiming for about 2 mm. Thin crackers crisp; thick ones stay soft.
- **Prick with a fork** (called docking) to stop big bubbles forming.
- **Cut before baking,** with a knife or pizza wheel, so they separate cleanly.

Baking

- **A hot oven for thin crackers** (200°C, or 180°C fan) and a medium one for thicker crackers and oatcakes (180°C, or 160°C fan).
- **Turn the tray halfway:** ovens have hot spots, and crackers at the edge brown first.
- **Bake until golden, not dark.** They crisp as they cool, so take them out when they are a deep cream-gold.
- **Cool on a wire rack** so steam can escape.

Keeping

Store cooled crackers in an airtight tin for about a week. If they soften, re-crisp on a tray in a warm oven (150°C, or 130°C fan) for 5 minutes.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Simple water crackers

35 minutes | 4 portions (about 20 crackers) | a dough with four ingredients, rolled thin

The base for all crackers: flour, salt, oil and water. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

150 g	plain flour, plus extra for rolling
½ tsp	salt
2 tbsp	olive oil
60 ml	cold water, about
1 tsp	flaky salt or seeds, to sprinkle (optional)

1. Mix the flour and salt, then stir in the oil and enough water to make a firm dough. Knead for 1 minute, cover, and leave for **15 minutes**.
2. Divide the dough into 2 and roll each piece on a floured surface as thin as you can (about **2 mm**). Prick all over with a fork and cut into squares or rounds with a knife or cutter.
3. Lay the crackers on a lined tray, brush with a little water and sprinkle with flaky salt or seeds.
4. Bake for **8 to 12 minutes**, turning the tray halfway, until golden and crisp. Cool on a wire rack: they crisp more as they cool.

> **DOUGH, COLOUR AND HEAT**
>
> **Raw flour and dough:** don't taste raw dough or lick the spoon. Raw flour can carry germs that are killed only by baking. Wash your hands, bowls and surfaces after handling it.
>
> **Go for gold.** Baked starchy foods such as crackers form acrylamide as they brown. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to bake to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.
>
> **Hot trays:** use dry oven gloves, pull the shelf out a little rather than reaching in, and put hot trays on a heatproof surface. Crackers go from golden to burnt in under a minute, so stay close to the oven for the last few minutes.

LEVEL 2 · OATS

Oatcakes

35 minutes | 4 portions (about 12 oatcakes) | a crumbly dough held together with hot water

Oatcakes are quick and wholesome, and good with strong cheese and chutney. Set the oven to 180°C (160°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

150 g	rolled or porridge oats
40 g	butter, melted (or oil)
½ tsp	salt
½ tsp	baking powder (optional)
60 ml	hot water, about

1. Whizz two-thirds of the oats in a food processor to a coarse flour (or crush with a rolling pin). Mix with the rest of the oats, salt and baking powder.
2. Stir in the melted butter and enough hot water to make a thick dough that holds together. Leave for 5 minutes to firm up.
3. Roll out on a lightly floured surface to about **4 mm** (they can be thicker than crackers). Cut into rounds with a cutter and place on a lined tray.
4. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until golden at the edges. Cool on a rack.

> **ALLERGENS AND HEAT**
>
> **Allergens:** crackers usually contain wheat flour (gluten), and seeded ones may contain sesame, which is a common allergen. Cheese straws contain milk and egg. Check labels and ask guests.
>
> **Hot trays:** use dry oven gloves, pull the shelf out a little rather than reaching in, and put hot trays on a heatproof surface. Crackers go from golden to burnt in under a minute, so stay close to the oven for the last few minutes.

LEVEL 2 · SEEDED

Seeded crispbread

40 minutes | 4 portions | rolling very thin and baking to crisp

A seed-packed cracker with more fibre. Rolled very thin and baked in one big sheet, then snapped into shards. Set the oven to 180°C (160°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

100 g	plain or wholemeal flour
50 g	mixed seeds (sunflower, pumpkin, linseed, sesame)
1 tbsp	olive oil
½ tsp	salt
1 tsp	rosemary or thyme, chopped (optional)
80 ml	water, about

1. Mix the flour, seeds, salt and herbs. Add the oil and water and stir to a sticky dough. Rest for 10 minutes.
2. Roll the dough between two sheets of baking paper to about **2 to 3 mm**, as thin and even as you can. Peel off the top sheet, score into rough rectangles with a knife and slide the bottom paper on to a tray.
3. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes**, until golden and crisp throughout. If the middle is still soft, return it to the oven for 5 minutes.
4. Cool completely, then snap along the score lines. Store in an airtight tin.

> **SESAME AND COLOUR**
>
> **Allergens:** crackers usually contain wheat flour (gluten), and seeded ones may contain sesame, which is a common allergen. Cheese straws contain milk and egg. Check labels and ask guests.
>
> **Go for gold.** Baked starchy foods such as crackers form acrylamide as they brown. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to bake to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

LEVEL 3 · PASTRY

Cheese straws

30 minutes | 6 portions (about 24 straws) | working with ready-made puff pastry and keeping it cold

The classic party snack. Ready-rolled puff pastry makes it quick: the pastry rises in layers. A full pastry course is planned in the series. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1 sheet	ready-rolled sheet of puff pastry (about 320 g)
80 g	mature cheddar or parmesan-style cheese, finely grated
1	Lion-marked egg, beaten
1 tsp	mustard powder or smoked paprika (optional)
1 tbsp	sesame or poppy seeds (optional)

1. Unroll the pastry on its paper. Brush with half the beaten egg and sprinkle half the cheese and the mustard or paprika over one half. Fold the other half over and press down.
2. Roll lightly with a rolling pin to seal. Brush the top with egg and sprinkle with the rest of the cheese and the seeds.
3. Cut into strips about 1.5 cm wide. Twist each strip a couple of times and lay on a lined tray, pressing the ends down.
4. Bake for **12 to 15 minutes**, until puffed and golden. Cool on a rack.

> **EGG, ALLERGENS AND COLOUR**
>
> **Egg:** Lion-marked eggs are safe lightly cooked, and here the egg is fully baked.
>
> **Allergens:** crackers usually contain wheat flour (gluten), and seeded ones may contain sesame, which is a common allergen. Cheese straws contain milk and egg. Check labels and ask guests.
>
> **Go for gold.** Baked starchy foods such as crackers form acrylamide as they brown. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to bake to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Rolling thickness

1 mm, 3 mm and 5 mm.

1. Divide a batch of the water cracker dough in three. Roll one very thin, one to about 3 mm, one to 5 mm, and bake them together.

Look for: The thinnest burn first and are brittle; the middle ones are crisp; the thick ones may be soft in the centre. Note the best thickness for your oven.

EXPERIMENT

Resting the dough

Rest or roll straight away.

1. Make two small batches of dough. Roll one straight away, and rest the other for 20 minutes before rolling.

Look for: The rested dough rolls out thinner and without shrinking back. The unrested one springs back and tears.

EXPERIMENT

Baking time

Pale, golden and dark.

1. Bake three crackers for 6, 10 and 14 minutes. Taste each when cool.

Look for: The pale one is chewy; the golden one is crisp and tastes of toasted flour; the dark one is bitter and, in baked starchy foods, the dark colour is the acrylamide warning. Aim for golden.

EXPERIMENT

Oil or butter

Which fat?

1. Make half a batch of water cracker dough with olive oil and half with melted butter.

Look for: The oil crackers are crisper and sharper; the butter crackers are richer, shorter and a bit more crumbly.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Simple water crackers				
Oatcakes				
Seeded crispbread				
Cheese straws				
Rolling thickness				
Resting the dough				
Baking time				
Oil vs butter				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Crackers are soft or chewy	Rolled too thick, or not baked long enough	Roll thinner; bake until golden; re-crisp in a warm oven
Dough shrinks back	Not rested	Rest for 15 minutes under a cloth

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Big bubbles	Not pricked	Prick all over with a fork
Burnt edges	Oven hot spots, or uneven thickness	Turn the tray; roll evenly; take out the edge crackers early
Bland crackers	Not enough salt or flavour	Add more salt, seeds, herbs or cheese
Cheese straws not rising	Pastry warm or pressed flat	Keep the pastry cold; don't press hard; bake in a hot oven

RAW DOUGH, HOT TRAYS AND ALLERGENS

Raw flour and dough: don't taste raw dough or lick the spoon. Raw flour can carry germs that are killed only by baking. Wash your hands, bowls and surfaces after handling it.

Hot trays: use dry oven gloves, pull the shelf out a little rather than reaching in, and put hot trays on a heatproof surface. Crackers go from golden to burnt in under a minute, so stay close to the oven for the last few minutes.

Go for gold. Baked starchy foods such as crackers form acrylamide as they brown. The Food Standards Agency's advice is to bake to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**.

Allergens: crackers usually contain wheat flour (gluten), and seeded ones may contain sesame, which is a common allergen. Cheese straws contain milk and egg. Check labels and ask guests.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a cracker dough and rest it.
- ☐ I can roll it thin and even.
- ☐ I can bake to golden, not dark.
- ☐ I can make cheese straws from ready-rolled pastry.
- ☐ I know how to store and re-crisp crackers.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 3 is Chutneys, Jams and Pickles: cooking down fruit, sugar and vinegar to go with cheese.

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Chapter 3 · Chutneys, Jams and Pickles

SKILL GOAL

Make chutneys, jam and quick pickles to go with cheese, and know when and how to keep them safely.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Cheese loves something sweet and something sharp beside it: chutney, jam, marmalade or a pickle. They are all cooked down sugar, acid and fruit or vegetables. The difference is in the proportions, and what you want at the end: **a thick, spoonable chutney, a set jam, or a crisp quick pickle**.

Which is which?

	CHUTNEY	JAM	QUICK PICKLE
Made from	Fruit and/or vegetables, vinegar, sugar, spices	Fruit, sugar and a little acid	Raw fruit or vegetable in a hot vinegar brine
Flavour	Sweet, sour, spiced	Sweet, fruity	Sharp, crisp, fresh
Time	45 to 60 minutes	30 to 45 minutes	15 minutes, plus chilling
Texture	Thick, jammy chunks	Soft set	Crisp
Matures?	Improves for a few days	Best fresh	Good after 1 hour, better the next day
Keeps (my route)	Fridge, about 2 weeks	Fridge, about 2 weeks	Fridge, about 1 week

What makes jam set

A jam needs three things: **pectin** (a natural gel in fruit, higher in under-ripe fruit, apples and citrus), **sugar** and **acid** (lemon juice helps). Heated together to about **105°C**, they gel when cool. Fruits low in pectin (figs, strawberries, cherries) set better with lemon juice or jam sugar, which has pectin added. Chutneys don't need to set: they just need to thicken by evaporation.

The wrinkle test

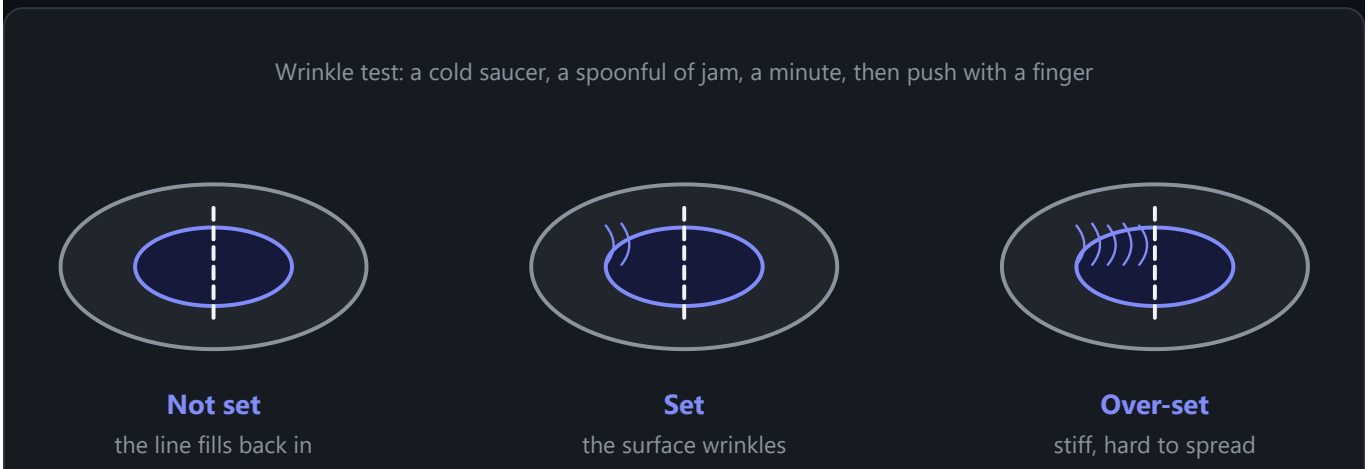


Figure 4. The wrinkle test. Chill a saucer, put on a spoonful of hot jam, wait a minute and push it with a finger. If it wrinkles ahead of your finger, it is set. Test little and often.

A thermometer is a guide, but the saucer test is more reliable. Boil, then test little and often: boiling for too long gives a hard, rubbery set.

The fridge route or sealed jars

- **The fridge route** is the simplest and lowest risk for a beginner. Make small batches in clean jars, refrigerate and eat within a couple of weeks.
- **Sealed jars** store for months, but need sterilised jars and lids and well-set, acidic recipes. Follow the sterilising box, and keep any jar that doesn't seal in the fridge. Once opened, keep sealed jars in the fridge.
- **Always use a clean spoon,** and throw it away if you see mould, smell fermentation or the lid has bulged.

Flavour

Balance sweet and sour: taste at the end and adjust. Add spice (mustard seed, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, chilli), and savoury depth (onion, balsamic) for cheese chutneys. Let chutney rest for a few days: the flavours blend and the vinegar mellows.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Apple and onion chutney

1 hour | about 3 jars (a 300 ml jar each) | simmering until thick, and balancing sweet and sharp

The classic partner for cheddar. Cooking down apples, onions, vinegar and sugar until thick and glossy is the whole skill.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

500 g	cooking apples, peeled, cored and diced
2	onions, chopped
100 g	raisins or sultanas
150 ml	cider vinegar
100 g	light brown sugar
1 tsp	mustard seeds
1 tsp	ground ginger
½ tsp	salt

1. Put everything in a large, deep, heavy pan. Bring to the boil, stirring until the sugar dissolves.
2. Simmer gently, uncovered, for **40 to 50 minutes**, stirring more often towards the end, until thick and no watery juice pools when you drag a spoon across the bottom of the pan.
3. Taste (carefully, on a cooled spoonful): adjust with a little more sugar or vinegar if needed.
4. Pour into clean jars. For the **fridge route**, cool, cover and refrigerate. For **sealed jars**, follow the sterilising box. Chutney tastes best after a few days.

> **HOT SUGAR AND KEEPING**
>
> **Hot sugar burns badly:** boiling jam and chutney reach well over 100°C and stick to skin, causing severe burns. Use a large, deep pan (the mixture rises when it boils), a long wooden spoon and oven gloves, keep children and pets out of the kitchen, and never taste jam straight from the boiling pan. Pour into jars with a jug or a jam funnel and a steady hand. Run a burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes and get medical help for a bad one.

Fridge route (the one I recommend for beginners): make a small batch, pour it into a clean jar, cool, and keep it in the fridge. Use within about **2 weeks** (a cautious general figure, not one from a preserving guideline). Always use a clean spoon, and throw it away if you see mould, smell fermentation, or the lid has bulged.

Sterilising jars (for sealed jars): wash jars and lids in hot soapy water and rinse. Stand the jars upright on a tray in an oven at 140°C (120°C fan) for about 15 minutes to dry and sterilise; most recipes I found use this setting, though the times varied between sources and I did not find an official preserving guideline. Fill them while they are still hot with the hot jam or chutney, leaving a gap of about 1 cm at the top, and put on the lids at once. Don't touch the inside of the jar or lid. If a lid does not seal, keep the jar in the fridge.

LEVEL 2 · SET

Fig or plum jam (a small batch)

40 minutes plus cooling | 2 small jars | reaching setting point and testing it

Fruit, sugar and acid make jam set. A small batch is quick and low-risk, and a fig or plum jam is superb with blue cheese and brie.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

500 g	ripe figs (or plums), stalks removed, chopped
300 g	jam sugar (with added pectin) or granulated sugar
1	lemon, zest and juice
100 ml	water

1. Put two saucers in the freezer. Put the fruit, water and lemon juice in a wide pan and simmer for **10 to 15 minutes**, until the fruit is soft.
2. Add the sugar and zest and stir over a low heat until the sugar dissolves completely. Then boil hard for **5 to 10 minutes**, stirring, until it reaches setting point (about 105°C on a thermometer).
3. Test with a cold saucer: put a spoonful on it, wait a minute, push with a finger. If it wrinkles, it is set. If not, boil for 2 minutes and test again.
4. Skim off any foam, cool for 10 minutes, then pour into clean jars. Keep in the fridge, or follow the sterilising box for sealed jars.

HOT SUGAR

Hot sugar burns badly: boiling jam and chutney reach well over 100°C and stick to skin, causing severe burns. Use a large, deep pan (the mixture rises when it boils), a long wooden spoon and oven gloves, keep children and pets out of the kitchen, and never taste jam straight from the boiling pan. Pour into jars with a jug or a jam funnel and a steady hand. Run a burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes and get medical help for a bad one.

Fridge route (the one I recommend for beginners): make a small batch, pour it into a clean jar, cool, and keep it in the fridge. Use within about **2 weeks** (a cautious general figure, not one from a preserving guideline). Always use a clean spoon, and throw it away if you see mould, smell fermentation, or the lid has bulged.

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LEVEL 2 · SLOW

Red onion marmalade

1 hour 10 minutes | about 2 jars | cooking onions slowly until sweet and jammy

Onions cooked slowly until soft and sticky, then finished with vinegar and sugar. It is brilliant with goat's cheese and cheddar, and in sandwiches.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

4	red onions, thinly sliced
2 tbsp	olive oil
75 g	light brown sugar
100 ml	red wine vinegar
1 tbsp	balsamic vinegar
1	sprig of thyme
½ tsp	salt

1. Heat the oil in a wide, heavy pan over a low heat. Add the onions, thyme and salt and cook gently for **25 to 30 minutes**, stirring often, until very soft and starting to colour. Don't let them burn.
2. Add the sugar and both vinegars. Simmer, uncovered, for **20 to 25 minutes**, stirring more as it thickens, until sticky and dark.
3. Remove the thyme. Taste: add a little more vinegar if too sweet, or sugar if too sharp.
4. Cool and pour into clean jars. Keep in the fridge and use within about 2 weeks, or follow the sterilising box for sealed jars.

HOT SUGAR

Hot sugar burns badly: boiling jam and chutney reach well over 100°C and stick to skin, causing severe burns. Use a large, deep pan (the mixture rises when it boils), a long wooden spoon and oven gloves, keep children and pets out of the kitchen, and never taste jam straight from the boiling pan. Pour into jars with a jug or a jam funnel and a steady hand. Run a burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes and get medical help for a bad one.

Fridge route (the one I recommend for beginners): make a small batch, pour it into a clean jar, cool, and keep it in the fridge. Use within about **2 weeks** (a cautious general figure, not one

from a preserving guideline). Always use a clean spoon, and throw it away if you see mould, smell fermentation, or the lid has bulged.

LEVEL 1 · QUICK

Quick pickled grapes or pears

15 minutes plus 1 hour | 4 portions | a quick vinegar pickle with a sweet twist

A fast pickle that needs no long cooking: sharp, sweet and crunchy, and beautiful next to blue cheese.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

250 g	seedless grapes (or 2 firm pears, sliced)
150 ml	white wine vinegar or cider vinegar
100 ml	water
2 tbsp	sugar
½ tsp	salt
1 tsp	mustard seeds or peppercorns
1	star anise or cinnamon stick (optional)

1. Pack the grapes (or pear slices) into a clean jar with the spices.
2. Heat the vinegar, water, sugar and salt until dissolved. Pour the hot brine over the fruit so it is covered.
3. Cool, then refrigerate for at least **1 hour** (better overnight).

KEEPING

Quick pickles are not preserved: keep them in the fridge in a covered jar and eat within about **1 week**.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Sugar and vinegar balance

Sweet versus sharp.

1. Divide a batch of chutney into three small pots near the end of cooking. Stir 1 teaspoon of extra sugar into one, 1 teaspoon of extra vinegar into another, and leave the third plain.
2. Taste each with a piece of cheddar.

Look for: The sweeter pot is milder and goes with sharp cheese; the sharper pot cuts through rich cheese; the plain pot is the balance you set. Decide which partner you want it for.

EXPERIMENT

Cooking time

Thin and thick.

1. Take a spoonful of chutney after 30 minutes of simmering, and another at the end (50 minutes). Cool and taste.

Look for: The early chutney is loose, wet and sharp; the late one is thick, glossy and sweet. You can stop whenever you like the texture.

EXPERIMENT

The wrinkle test

Test at three stages.

1. While making the jam, test with a cold saucer after 5 minutes of boiling, after 8, and after 10.

Look for: The first test is runny, the next may wrinkle slightly, and the last is firmly set. This shows you what each stage looks like and how fast it changes.

EXPERIMENT

Fresh or after a week

Time improves chutney.

1. Taste a spoonful of the apple chutney on the day you make it. Taste another a week later from the fridge.

Look for: The vinegar mellows and the flavours blend. This is why chutney is made ahead.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Apple and onion chutney				
Fig or plum jam				
Red onion marmalade				
Quick pickled grapes or pears				
Sugar vs vinegar				
Cooking time				
The wrinkle test				
Fresh vs a week later				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Jam won't set	Too little pectin, sugar or boiling	Add lemon juice or jam sugar and boil for a few minutes; test with a cold saucer
Jam is rubbery	Boiled too long	Next time test earlier; loosen by warming with a splash of water

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Chutney too runny	Not cooked down enough	Simmer a little longer, uncovered
Chutney too sharp	Too much vinegar	Add sugar and simmer a few minutes; leave a few days
Burnt on the bottom	Heat too high or too little stirring	Don't scrape; pour into a clean pan; lower the heat
Mould on top	Not sealed, or kept too long	Throw the jar away; don't scrape off and use

HOT SUGAR, JARS AND KEEPING

Hot sugar burns badly: boiling jam and chutney reach well over 100°C and stick to skin, causing severe burns. Use a large, deep pan (the mixture rises when it boils), a long wooden spoon and oven gloves, keep children and pets out of the kitchen, and never taste jam straight from the boiling pan. Pour into jars with a jug or a jam funnel and a steady hand. Run a burn under cool running water for at least 20 minutes and get medical help for a bad one.

Sterilising jars (for sealed jars): wash jars and lids in hot soapy water and rinse. Stand the jars upright on a tray in an oven at 140°C (120°C fan) for about 15 minutes to dry and sterilise; most recipes I found use this setting, though the times varied between sources and I did not find an official preserving guideline. Fill them while they are still hot with the hot jam or chutney, leaving a gap of about 1 cm at the top, and put on the lids at once. Don't touch the inside of the jar or lid. If a lid does not seal, keep the jar in the fridge.

Fridge route (the one I recommend for beginners): make a small batch, pour it into a clean jar, cool, and keep it in the fridge. Use within about **2 weeks** (a cautious general figure, not one from a preserving guideline). Always use a clean spoon, and throw it away if you see mould, smell fermentation, or the lid has bulged.

Allergens: chutneys and pickles may contain mustard seed, celery or nuts, and some spice mixes contain gluten. Check labels if anyone you cook for has an allergy.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a thick chutney by simmering and testing.
- ☐ I can test jam with a cold saucer.
- ☐ I know why jam needs pectin, sugar and acid.
- ☐ I know the fridge route and the sealed-jar route, and which to choose.
- ☐ I handle hot sugar safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 4 is Baked and Hot Cheese: melting without splitting, and baking soft cheese.

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Chapter 4 · Baked and Hot Cheese

SKILL GOAL

Melt, bake and fry cheese so it stays smooth and gooey, never greasy or stringy.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Melted cheese is comfort food, but it is surprisingly easy to spoil. Heat it too fast and it turns stringy and greasy. This chapter is about **melting gently, choosing the right cheese, and baking soft cheese safely**, and a few dishes that do all three.



Figure 5. Cheese melts best gently. Too much heat tightens the proteins and squeezes out the fat, so it turns stringy and greasy.

Why cheese splits

Cheese is milk proteins holding fat and water together. Gentle heat melts the fat and loosens the proteins into a smooth blend. **Too much heat** tightens the proteins into rubbery clumps and squeezes out the fat. The cure is low heat, grated cheese (it melts evenly), and a stabiliser such as a little flour or cornflour in sauces and fondues.

Which cheese melts well?

CHEESE	MELTS?	GOOD FOR
Cheddar, gruyère, emmental, gouda	Yes, smoothly (younger melts better than very mature)	Sauces, toasties, fondue, rarebit
Mozzarella	Yes, stretchy	Pizza, baked dishes
Camembert, brie	Yes, gooey inside the rind	Baking whole
Halloumi, paneer	No: they soften and brown but keep their shape	Frying, grilling
Feta, goat's cheese	Soften, don't flow	Baking, stuffing
Parmesan-style hard cheeses	Melt only at the edges, best grated	Topping, sauces
Soft blue	Melts into sauces	A small amount in a sauce

Tips

- **Grate it,** and let it come to room temperature first: it melts more evenly.
- **Add cheese off the heat or on a low heat,** a handful at a time.
- **Don't boil** a cheese sauce once the cheese is in.
- **Add a little starch** (flour, cornflour) to stabilise a fondue or sauce.
- **A little acid** (lemon juice) helps the cheese melt smoothly.
- **Serve at once.** Melted cheese sets and goes rubbery as it cools.

Baking soft cheese

A whole soft-rind cheese (camembert, brie) baked until molten inside is a showpiece. It is also a way to serve a cheese that pregnant women would otherwise avoid, but **only** if the middle is steaming hot. Take off all plastic and paper first, and score the top so the heat reaches the centre.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Baked camembert

25 minutes | 4 portions | baking a soft cheese until molten and steaming hot

The party classic: a whole soft cheese baked in its box until the middle is molten. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	whole camembert or brie in its box (about 250 g)
1	garlic clove, sliced
1 sprig	rosemary or thyme
1 tbsp	honey
1 handful	walnuts or pecans, chopped (optional)
1	loaf of crusty bread, apple slices and celery, to dip

1. Remove all the paper and plastic wrapping from the cheese, and put it back in its wooden box (if it has one) or on a small tray lined with baking paper. Score the top in a criss-cross, cutting through the rind.
2. Push the garlic slices and herb into the cuts. Drizzle with honey.
3. Bake for **15 to 20 minutes**, until the cheese is molten and bubbling in the middle and **steaming hot all the way through**.
4. Sprinkle with nuts and serve at once with bread, apple slices and celery for dipping.

> **HOT AND PREGNANCY**
>
> **Hot cheese:** melted cheese and fondue stay very hot for a long time and stick to skin and the roof of the mouth. Let things cool for a minute before eating, warn guests, and keep children's portions to cool. A fondue pot has a naked flame or hot element: keep it on a stable, heatproof surface, away from the table edge, and never leave it unattended.
>
> **Pregnancy and baked cheese:** the NHS advice, as I found it, is that mould-ripened cheeses such as brie and camembert, and soft blue cheeses, are fine for pregnant women **if they are cooked until steaming hot all the way through**. So a baked camembert is safe only when the

middle is piping hot, not just warm and soft. Check the current NHS list at nhs.uk if it matters to you.

LEVEL 1 · PRACTICE

Halloumi with honey and lemon

15 minutes | 3 portions | frying a cheese that doesn't melt

Halloumi holds its shape when it is cooked, so it can be fried or grilled until golden. Choose a pasteurised one (almost all are) and dry it well.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

225 g	halloumi, sliced about 1 cm thick
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	honey
1	lemon, juice of half and a wedge
1 pinch	chilli flakes or dried oregano (optional)

1. Pat the halloumi slices dry with kitchen paper. Heat the oil in a non-stick pan over a medium-high heat.
2. Fry for **1 to 2 minutes a side**, until deep golden and a little crisp at the edges.
3. Drizzle with honey and lemon juice, scatter with chilli or oregano, and serve at once: it goes rubbery as it cools.

HOT OIL

Hot oil: never leave a pan of hot oil unattended. If oil starts to smoke, take the pan off the heat and let it cool. Never put water on a pan fire: turn off the heat and cover it with a lid or damp cloth, then get out of the room and call 999 if it spreads. Dry vegetables well, because water on hot oil spits.

LEVEL 2 · SAUCE ON TOAST

Alcohol-free rarebit

25 minutes | 4 portions (4 slices) | making a stable cheese mixture and grilling it

Welsh rarebit is usually made with beer. This version uses milk, so there is no alcohol, with mustard and cayenne for a bite.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

200 g	mature cheddar, grated
1 tbsp	plain flour
1 tsp	English mustard
60 ml	milk
1 tbsp	Worcestershire sauce (leave out for vegetarians)
1	egg yolk, from a Lion-marked egg
4	slices of good bread
1 pinch	black pepper and cayenne

1. Warm the milk with the mustard and Worcestershire sauce in a small pan over a low heat. Stir in the flour, then the cheese a handful at a time, stirring gently until it melts into a thick, smooth paste. Don't let it boil.
2. Take off the heat and beat in the egg yolk and pepper. Cool for 5 minutes so it thickens.
3. Toast the bread on one side under a hot grill. Turn, spread the cheese mixture thickly over the untoasted side and grill for **3 to 4 minutes**, until bubbling and golden-brown in spots.
4. Eat straight away, cooled for a minute.

> ALLERGENS AND EGG
>
> **Allergens:** these dishes contain milk and gluten (bread), and the rarebit contains mustard. Worcestershire sauce contains anchovies (fish), so leave it out for vegetarians and for anyone with a fish allergy.
>
> **Hot cheese:** melted cheese and fondue stay very hot for a long time and stick to skin and the roof of the mouth. Let things cool for a minute before eating, warn guests, and keep children's

> portions to cool. A fondue pot has a naked flame or hot element: keep it on a stable, heatproof surface, away from the table edge, and never leave it unattended.

LEVEL 3 · FONDUE

Alcohol-free cheese fondue

30 minutes | 4 portions | melting a lot of cheese into a smooth sauce that stays smooth

Fondue is traditionally made with wine and kirsch. This version uses milk or stock with lemon juice instead, and a little cornflour to keep the sauce smooth.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

250 g	gruyère or a strong melting cheese, grated
150 g	emmental or cheddar, grated
1 tbsp	cornflour
250 ml	milk or vegetable stock
1	garlic clove, halved
1 tsp	lemon juice
1 pinch	nutmeg and white pepper
1	loaf of crusty bread, cubed, with apple, pear, small cooked potatoes and vegetables, to dip

1. Rub the inside of a heavy pan with the cut garlic, then discard it. Toss the grated cheeses with the cornflour.
2. Heat the milk or stock with the lemon juice until it is steaming but not boiling. Add the cheese a handful at a time, stirring in a figure of eight over a low heat, letting each handful melt before adding the next.
3. Stir until smooth and bubbling very gently. Season with nutmeg and pepper.
4. Move to a fondue pot or a small pan on a warm plate, and serve with bread and things to dip.

> **HOT POTS AND SHARING**
>
> **Hot cheese:** melted cheese and fondue stay very hot for a long time and stick to skin and the roof of the mouth. Let things cool for a minute before eating, warn guests, and keep children's portions to cool. A fondue pot has a naked flame or hot element: keep it on a stable, heatproof surface, away from the table edge, and never leave it unattended.

> **Fondue and sharing:** use a fork to dip once and eat from a different fork, never put a fork that has been in your mouth back in the pot. Eat shared dips and fondues within a short time and throw away what is left rather than reheating it again and again.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Low or high heat

Melting grated cheese.

1. Melt a small handful of grated cheddar in two pans: one on a very low heat, stirring, and one on a high heat.

Look for: The low-heat cheese melts smoothly and glossily. The high-heat cheese splits, going stringy with a puddle of oil. This is what to avoid.

EXPERIMENT

Which cheese melts best

A melting test.

1. Put a cube each of cheddar, mozzarella, halloumi and feta on a baking tray. Bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for 8 minutes.

Look for: Cheddar spreads and bubbles, mozzarella stretches, and halloumi and feta soften but keep their shape. Match the cheese to the job.

EXPERIMENT

With or without starch

Fondue stability.

1. Make half the fondue with cornflour and half without.

Look for: The version with starch stays smooth and creamy, while the other may separate or go stringy. See how much more forgiving starch makes it.

EXPERIMENT

Grated or sliced

Melting speed.

1. Put 40 g of cheddar grated on one slice of toast and 40 g in thick slices on another. Grill for the same time.

Look for: The grated cheese melts evenly and browns; the sliced cheese melts slowly and unevenly. Grating gives a better, faster result.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Baked camembert				
Halloumi with honey				
Alcohol-free rarebit				
Alcohol-free fondue				
Low vs high heat				
Which melts best				
With or without starch				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Grated vs sliced				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Stringy, greasy cheese	Too hot	Lower the heat; add cheese gradually off the boil
Lumpy fondue	Cheese added too fast, or not enough stabiliser	Whisk hard; add a little more cornflour mixed with milk
Camembert not hot in the middle	Not baked long enough	Bake for a few more minutes until steaming hot
Rubbery halloumi	Left to cool, or overcooked	Serve straight away, 1 to 2 minutes a side
Rarebit runs off the toast	Mixture too thin or hot	Chill it for 10 minutes; use thicker toast
Bread goes soggy	Fondue too thin	Simmer a little longer; add cornflour

HOT CHEESE AND SAFETY

Hot cheese: melted cheese and fondue stay very hot for a long time and stick to skin and the roof of the mouth. Let things cool for a minute before eating, warn guests, and keep children's portions to cool. A fondue pot has a naked flame or hot element: keep it on a stable, heatproof surface, away from the table edge, and never leave it unattended.

Pregnancy and baked cheese: the NHS advice, as I found it, is that mould-ripened cheeses such as brie and camembert, and soft blue cheeses, are fine for pregnant women **if they are cooked until steaming hot all the way through**. So a baked camembert is safe only when the middle is piping hot, not just warm and soft. Check the current NHS list at nhs.uk if it matters to you.

Fondue and sharing: use a fork to dip once and eat from a different fork, never put a fork that has been in your mouth back in the pot. Eat shared dips and fondues within a short time and throw away what is left rather than reheating it again and again.

Allergens: these dishes contain milk and gluten (bread), and the rarebit contains mustard.

Worcestershire sauce contains anchovies (fish), so leave it out for vegetarians and for anyone with a fish allergy.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know why cheese splits and how to stop it.
- ☐ I can melt cheese gently and add a stabiliser.
- ☐ I can bake a soft cheese until steaming hot all the way through.
- ☐ I can make rarebit and fondue without alcohol.
- ☐ I serve hot cheese safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 5 is Party Bites: pigs in blankets, sausage rolls, pinwheels and stuffed mushrooms.

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Chapter 5 · Party Bites

SKILL GOAL

Make hot party bites ahead, cook them through safely, and offer a vegetarian choice.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Party bites are small, hot, savoury things that guests can eat in one or two bites. They are mostly pastry and a filling, and what makes them work is **doing most of the work ahead** so that all you have to do at the party is bake and serve.

The party-bite rules

- **Bite-sized:** one or two bites, no knife and fork, and nothing that drips.
- **Make ahead:** assemble the day before, chill, and bake just before serving.
- **Cooked through:** any meat, sausage or bacon must be steaming hot all the way through. Test one.
- **Hot and crisp:** serve straight from the oven. Pastry softens within the hour.
- **Offer a vegetarian choice** and label which is which.

Working with puff pastry

- **Keep it cold.** Warm pastry sticks, tears and bakes flat. Work quickly and chill between steps.
- **Use a sharp knife,** cutting straight down, because dragging seals the layers.
- **Egg wash on top only,** not the cut edges, so they can rise.
- **A hot oven** (200°C, or 180°C fan) puffs it before the fat melts away.
- **Score and rest:** scoring the top lets steam out, and chilling shaped bites for 20 minutes makes them rise better.

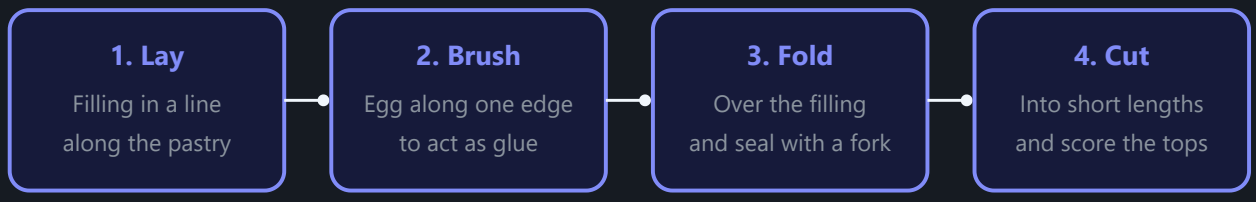


Figure 6. The sausage roll method, which also works for vegetarian rolls. Keep the pastry cold and don't overfill.

Making ahead

BITE	ASSEMBLE AHEAD	KEEP	BAKE
Pigs in blankets	Wrap, cover and chill	Raw, in the fridge for a day (check the use-by); or freeze raw	From chilled, 25 to 30 minutes
Sausage rolls	Assemble, cut and chill (not egg-washed)	Raw, in the fridge for a day, or freeze on a tray	Egg wash and bake from chilled or frozen, adding a few minutes
Pinwheels	Roll and chill, cut just before baking	Rolled and wrapped, 1 day in the fridge	Slice and bake, 15 to 20 minutes
Stuffed mushrooms	Fill and chill	Filled, 1 day in the fridge	From chilled, 15 to 20 minutes

COOKING AHEAD

Cooking ahead: if you cook party food in advance, cool it quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), refrigerate it covered, eat within **2 days**, and reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. Raw wrapped sausages can be kept in the fridge, covered, for a day before baking (check the use-by date on the pack).

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Pigs in blankets

40 minutes | 4 portions (12 pieces) | wrapping and cooking sausages through

A party favourite and easy to make ahead. Stretch the bacon with the back of a knife so it wraps thinly and crisps. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

12	chipolata sausages (or vegetarian sausages)
6	rashers of streaky bacon, halved (or thin slices of vegetarian bacon-style rashers)
1 tbsp	honey or maple syrup (optional)
1 pinch	black pepper

1. Cut the bacon rashers in half and stretch each piece with the flat of a knife until it is long and thin.
2. Wrap each sausage in a piece of bacon, tucking the ends underneath, and lay them seam side down on a tray.
3. Roast for **25 to 30 minutes**, turning once, until the bacon is crisp and the sausages are cooked through. Brush with honey for the last 5 minutes if you like.
4. Cut one open to check there is no pink, and serve hot.

> **PORK, HYGIENE AND VEGETARIANS**
>
> **Sausages and pork:** sausages, sausage meat and bacon must be cooked right through until steaming hot, with no pink meat and clear juices (70°C for 2 minutes). Cut one open to check. Wash your hands, board and knife after handling raw meat, and keep it away from ready-to-eat food.
>
> **Allergens:** pastry contains gluten, and these recipes contain milk, egg, and in some cases mustard. Pigs in blankets and sausage rolls contain pork and so aren't suitable for some religions or vegetarians: offer a vegetarian version and label which is which.

LEVEL 2 · PASTRY

Sausage rolls

50 minutes | 6 portions (about 18 small rolls) | assembling a roll and cooking the filling through

Homemade sausage rolls are far better than the shop's. A full pastry course is planned in this series. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1 sheet	ready-rolled sheet of puff pastry (about 320 g)
400 g	good-quality sausage meat (or 2 sausages, skinned)
1	small onion, finely chopped and softened
1 tsp	dried sage or thyme
1	Lion-marked egg, beaten
1 tbsp	sesame or poppy seeds (optional)
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Mix the sausage meat with the onion, herbs and pepper (don't taste it raw). Unroll the pastry and cut it in half lengthways to make two long strips.
2. Roll half the filling into a long sausage shape and lay it down the middle of a strip. Brush one edge with egg, fold the pastry over the filling and press the edge down with a fork to seal.
3. Cut into 3 to 4 cm lengths, score the tops with a knife, brush with egg and scatter with seeds. Place seam-side down on a lined tray.
4. Bake for **25 to 30 minutes**, until the pastry is golden and puffed and the filling is cooked through with no pink: cut one in half to check.

> **RAW MEAT AND EGG**
>
> **Sausages and pork:** sausages, sausage meat and bacon must be cooked right through until steaming hot, with no pink meat and clear juices (70°C for 2 minutes). Cut one open to check. Wash your hands, board and knife after handling raw meat, and keep it away from ready-to-eat food.
>
> **Raw pastry and egg:** don't taste raw pastry mixtures. Lion-marked eggs are safe lightly cooked, and in these recipes the egg wash is baked fully. Wash your hands after handling raw egg and

raw meat.

Allergens: pastry contains gluten, and these recipes contain milk, egg, and in some cases mustard. Pigs in blankets and sausage rolls contain pork and so aren't suitable for some religions or vegetarians: offer a vegetarian version and label which is which.

LEVEL 2 · VEGETARIAN

Cheese and onion pinwheels

40 minutes | 6 portions (about 20 pinwheels) | rolling a spiral and slicing it neatly

A vegetarian party bite: puff pastry spread with mustard, onion and cheese, rolled up and sliced. Chill the roll before cutting for neat pinwheels.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1 sheet	ready-rolled sheet of puff pastry
1	onion, finely sliced and softened in butter
100 g	mature cheddar, grated
1 tbsp	wholegrain mustard
1	Lion-marked egg, beaten
1 tsp	chopped thyme or chives

1. Soften the sliced onion in a little butter for 10 minutes until sweet. Cool.
2. Unroll the pastry on its paper and spread with the mustard, then scatter the onion, cheese and herbs over it, leaving a 1 cm edge on one long side. Brush that edge with egg.
3. Roll up tightly from the other long side, finishing on the egg edge. Wrap and chill for **20 minutes**.
4. Cut into 1.5 cm slices, lay flat on a lined tray, brush with egg and bake at 200°C (180°C fan) for **15 to 20 minutes**, until golden.

EGG AND ALLERGENS

Raw pastry and egg: don't taste raw pastry mixtures. Lion-marked eggs are safe lightly cooked, and in these recipes the egg wash is baked fully. Wash your hands after handling raw egg and raw meat.

Allergens: pastry contains gluten, and these recipes contain milk, egg, and in some cases mustard. Pigs in blankets and sausage rolls contain pork and so aren't suitable for some religions or vegetarians: offer a vegetarian version and label which is which.

LEVEL 2 · FILLED

Stuffed mushrooms

35 minutes | 4 portions (12 mushrooms) | filling and baking until hot all the way through

Little caps of cream cheese, garlic and herbs. They can be filled ahead and baked just before the party. Set the oven to 200°C (180°C fan).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

12	medium button or chestnut mushrooms, stalks removed
100 g	pasteurised cream cheese
1	garlic clove, crushed
2 tbsp	fresh breadcrumbs
2 tbsp	grated hard cheese
1 tbsp	chopped parsley or chives
1 tsp	olive oil
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Wipe the mushrooms clean and remove the stalks. Chop the stalks finely and mix them with the cream cheese, garlic, herbs, half the breadcrumbs and half the hard cheese. Season.
2. Spoon the filling into the caps and place on a tray. Mix the remaining crumbs and cheese with the oil and sprinkle on top.
3. Bake for **15 to 20 minutes**, until golden and bubbling and the filling is steaming hot.
4. Cool for 2 minutes and serve warm.

> HOT FILLING
>
> **Hot trays and fillings:** use dry oven gloves, and warn guests: the filling inside pastry stays very hot after the outside has cooled.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Sealing and scoring

Seal the roll or leave it open.

1. Make two sausage rolls: one sealed with a fork and scored on top, one sealed but left unscored.

Look for: The scored roll lets steam out and puffs evenly; the unscored one can balloon or split at the sides.

EXPERIMENT

Oven temperature

Hot or moderate.

1. Bake two pinwheels at 200°C (180°C fan) and two at 160°C (140°C fan) on separate trays.

Look for: The hot oven gives puffier, golden pastry; the cooler oven gives pale, flat, greasier pastry. Pastry needs a hot oven.

EXPERIMENT

Making ahead and reheating

Fresh or from the fridge.

1. Bake half of the pinwheels straight away. Chill the rest overnight and bake them cold. Compare puff and crispness.

Look for: Chilled pastry often puffs even better. Baked and reheated pastry loses crispness, so bake just before serving.

EXPERIMENT

Freezing

Frozen sausage rolls.

1. Freeze half of the unbaked sausage rolls on a tray, then bake straight from frozen, adding 5 to 10 minutes.

Look for: Frozen rolls bake well and are a great way to prepare ahead. Check they are cooked through and steaming hot in the middle.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Pigs in blankets				
Sausage rolls				
Cheese and onion pinwheels				
Stuffed mushrooms				
Sealing and scoring				
Oven temperature				
Making ahead				
Freezing				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pastry won't rise	Warm pastry, or a cool oven	Chill before baking; use a hot oven
Soggy bottoms	Wet filling, or tray not hot	Cook the filling down; bake on a preheated tray

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Filling leaks out	Not sealed, or overfilled	Seal with egg and a fork; use less filling
Sausage not cooked in the middle	Pieces too thick, or oven too cool	Cook longer; cut one open to check
Bacon not crisp	Wrapped too thick	Stretch it thin; roast on a rack
Pinwheels unroll	Not wrapped and chilled	Chill the roll for 20 minutes before slicing

MEAT, ALLERGENS AND HEAT

Sausages and pork: sausages, sausage meat and bacon must be cooked right through until steaming hot, with no pink meat and clear juices (70°C for 2 minutes). Cut one open to check. Wash your hands, board and knife after handling raw meat, and keep it away from ready-to-eat food.

Raw pastry and egg: don't taste raw pastry mixtures. Lion-marked eggs are safe lightly cooked, and in these recipes the egg wash is baked fully. Wash your hands after handling raw egg and raw meat.

Allergens: pastry contains gluten, and these recipes contain milk, egg, and in some cases mustard. Pigs in blankets and sausage rolls contain pork and so aren't suitable for some religions or vegetarians: offer a vegetarian version and label which is which.

Hot trays and fillings: use dry oven gloves, and warn guests: the filling inside pastry stays very hot after the outside has cooled.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make pigs in blankets and cook the meat through.
- ☐ I can assemble a sausage roll and a pinwheel from cold pastry.
- ☐ I know how to make party bites ahead and freeze them.
- ☐ I offer a vegetarian choice and label it.
- ☐ I keep raw meat and cooked food apart.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 6 is A Party Spread: planning quantities, timing and safe serving.

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1

Chapter 6 · A Party Spread

SKILL GOAL

Plan, time and serve a cheese-and-snacks party spread safely, with something for every guest.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

The last chapter is about **putting it together**. You can choose and serve cheese, make crackers and chutney, melt and bake cheese, and make party bites. Hosting is mostly planning: how much to make, in what order, and how to serve it safely.

How much?

OCCASION	CHEESE PER PERSON	BITES PER PERSON	NOTES
Cheese board as a snack	50 to 100 g	n/a	Plus fruit and crackers
Cheese course after a meal	40 to 60 g	n/a	Two or three cheeses
Party, spread is the only food	50 to 80 g	8 to 10 bites	A mix of hot and cold
Party, after a meal	30 to 50 g	3 to 5 bites	Lighter choices
Buffet, as one part of many dishes	30 to 40 g	4 to 6 bites	Add salads and bread

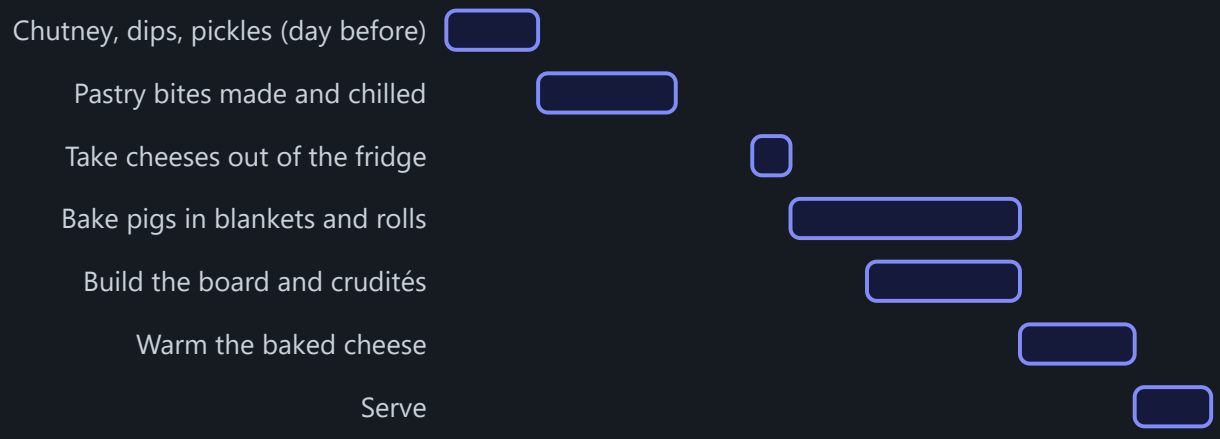
These are rough guides, not rules. Plan a little extra of the popular things, and remember that plain crackers, fruit and vegetables stretch a spread cheaply and healthily.

A spread that works

- **A cold base,** made ahead: a board, crudités, dips, olives, pickles.
- **Two or three hot things,** cooked just before: party bites, baked cheese.

- **Something fresh:** fruit and raw vegetables cut the richness.
- **Something for everyone:** vegetarian, nut-free and gluten-free choices.
- **One showpiece:** a baked camembert or a big board.

The running order



A rough order of work (left = earlier). Everything possible is made ahead.

Figure 7. A running order for a party for 8. The slowest and coldest jobs are done a day ahead, and the last 45 minutes are for baking, building the board and serving.

Work back from when the guests arrive. Start with the things that improve with time (chutney, pickles, dips), then the pastry bites that need to be chilled, and leave the baking and the board for the last hour.

Your skills table

SKILL	CHAPTER	BEST FOR	MY TOP TIP
Choosing, storing and serving cheese	Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 1	Boards and gifts	Take it out of the fridge 30 to 60 minutes ahead
Crackers and crispbreads	Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 2	Making a board special; gifts	Roll thin, bake until golden
Chutneys, jams and pickles	Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 3	Partners for cheese; gifts	Fridge route first; test with a cold saucer
Baked and hot cheese	Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 4	Showpieces and comfort food	Melt gently, bake soft cheese until steaming hot

SKILL	CHAPTER	BEST FOR	MY TOP TIP
Party bites	Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 5	Hot canapés and buffets	Make ahead and chill; cook meat through

Fill in your own tips below.

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
My favourite cheese combination				
My best cracker				
My best chutney or jam				
My favourite hot cheese dish				
My best party bite				
My signature board				

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A party spread for 8

Prepare over 2 days; about 1 hour 30 minutes on the day | 8 portions | planning quantities and timing for a crowd

No new recipes: you cook what you have learned. As a rough guide, if the spread is the only food at a party of 8, plan for roughly 8 to 10 bites each. If it follows a meal, plan less. Write a running order and make everything possible the day before.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

1 batch	a cheese board for eight: four cheeses, 600 g in all (Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1, chapter 1)
1 batch	homemade crackers (chapter 2), or a mix of shop-bought ones
1 batch	two chutneys or jams (chapter 3)
1 batch	pigs in blankets and a vegetarian alternative (chapter 5)
1 batch	sausage rolls or cheese and onion pinwheels (chapter 5)
1 batch	baked camembert (chapter 4)
400 g	crudités (carrot, cucumber, pepper, celery) with a pasteurised dip
1 handful	grapes, apples, nuts for the board

1. **Two days before:** make the chutneys and pickles (they improve with time). Bake the crackers and store in a tin.
2. **The day before:** assemble the sausage rolls, pigs in blankets and pinwheels, cover and chill. Make the dip, wash and cut the crudités, and keep them in damp kitchen paper in the fridge.
3. **1 hour 30 minutes before:** take the cheeses out of the fridge (30 to 45 minutes before serving). Bake the party bites, then the camembert, so they go out hot.
4. **30 minutes before:** build the board (see chapter 1), put out the crudités and dip, and label everything. Bring the hot food out last.

> **FEEDING A CROWD**

Serving a crowd: keep hot food hot (above about 63°C, in a low oven) and cold food cold (in the fridge until needed). Don't leave food out for hours: a cautious rule of thumb is to put cold food back in the fridge after about **2 hours**, and less in a warm room. That figure is a common food-safety habit; I haven't confirmed the exact UK Food Standards Agency buffet guidance.

Label for guests: put a small card by each cheese and each hot dish saying what it is, whether it is vegetarian, and whether it contains nuts, gluten, egg or fish. Mark which cheeses are hard or pasteurised and which are soft ripened or unpasteurised, and say which hot dishes (baked camembert) are cooked until steaming hot, so that pregnant guests (and others who need to avoid certain cheeses) can choose. The NHS list is at nhs.uk.

LEVEL 2 · TO GO

A cheese-and-cracker snack box

10 minutes | 1 portion | packing a snack that stays safe and tastes good

A grown-up lunchbox: a little cheese, crackers, fruit and a sweet-sharp partner. The point is a snack that travels.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1 handful	crackers or oatcakes
40 g	hard cheese, in slices
1 handful	grapes
1 tbsp	chutney in a small lidded pot
1 handful	nuts (check allergies) or celery and carrot sticks
1	reusable box with a lid

1. Pack the cheese and chutney on the cold side of the box (next to an ice pack if it will be out for a while), the crackers in a separate compartment so they stay crisp, and the fruit and nuts in the gaps.
2. Keep it cool: in a cool bag with an ice pack if it will be more than 2 hours out of the fridge.
3. Eat the same day. Don't keep leftover cheese from a box that has been out for hours.

> **KEEP IT COOL**
>
> A lidded box next to an ice pack in a cool bag keeps the cheese cold enough for a day out. Hard cheese travels best.

LEVEL 3 · PLAN

A party buffet plan (Christmas-style, no alcohol)

Plan on paper in 30 minutes | 10 to 12 portions | building a buffet in zones that don't compete

For a larger party, divide the table into zones: cold, hot, sweet and drinks. A buffet isn't a recipe, it is a plan. Write it down.

INGREDIENTS (10 PORTIONS)

1 batch	a make-ahead cold platter: cheese board, crudités, olives, pickles
1 batch	a hot station: baked camembert, sausage rolls, pigs in blankets (kept in a low oven)
1 batch	a sweet table: fruit, nuts and a plate of dried fruit and dark chocolate (optional)
1 batch	a drinks table: water, juice and non-alcoholic punch

1. Write a list of what you will serve in each zone, and who it suits (vegetarian, nut-free, gluten-free).
2. Write a timeline back from the start time, using a chart like the one in this chapter. Put the hot items in the oven in staggered batches so there is always something hot.
3. Set up the cold platters about 30 minutes before guests arrive and keep the hot food in a warm oven (about 70°C, or 50°C fan) until it goes on the table.
4. Label everything. Plan to top up and clear every hour or so, and clear leftovers into the fridge after about 2 hours.

> **BUFFET SAFETY**
>
> **Serving a crowd:** keep hot food hot (above about 63°C, in a low oven) and cold food cold (in the fridge until needed). Don't leave food out for hours: a cautious rule of thumb is to put cold food back in the fridge after about **2 hours**, and less in a warm room. That figure is a common food-safety habit; I haven't confirmed the exact UK Food Standards Agency buffet guidance.
>
> **Leftovers:** cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

A timed spread

A party for 4 in one afternoon.

1. Write a running order for a small spread: a board, one baked bite and one dip. Cook it, noting when each part was ready.

Look for: Compare your plan with what happened. The usual mistakes are starting the baking too late and leaving too many jobs for the last 10 minutes. Adjust and keep the plan for next time.

EXPERIMENT

Swap one dish

Same spread, different dish.

1. Take a spread you have made and swap one dish: for example the sausage rolls for pinwheels, or the apple chutney for the fig jam.

Look for: A good spread has a structure (cold, hot, sweet, fresh, vegetarian) that survives swaps. Note which swap worked and why.

EXPERIMENT

Your own signature board

Choose a theme.

1. Pick a theme (a British board, a sweet-and-sharp board, a vegetarian board) and choose three cheeses, a cracker, a chutney or jam and two accompaniments that fit it.

Look for: Write the board down: what, how much, and what you would change. That is your first house spread.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Party spread for 8				
Snack box				
Buffet plan				
Timed spread				
Swapped dish				
Signature board				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Everything ready at once or nothing ready	No running order	Write one, working back from when guests arrive
Too much work on the day	Not enough made ahead	Make chutneys, dips and pastry bites ahead; bake just before
Food runs out	Too little planned	Add cheap fillers: fruit, crudités, bread; plan more of the hot favourites
Hot food goes cold	Brought out too early	Keep it in a low oven; bring it out in batches
A guest can't eat anything	Didn't ask	Ask beforehand; label dishes; keep a safe option
Leftover food unsafe	Left out too long	Clear into the fridge after about 2 hours; throw away anything left out all evening

PARTY FOOD SAFETY

Serving a crowd: keep hot food hot (above about 63°C, in a low oven) and cold food cold (in the fridge until needed). Don't leave food out for hours: a cautious rule of thumb is to put cold food back in the fridge after about **2 hours**, and less in a warm room. That figure is a common food-safety habit; I haven't confirmed the exact UK Food Standards Agency buffet guidance.

Label for guests: put a small card by each cheese and each hot dish saying what it is, whether it is vegetarian, and whether it contains nuts, gluten, egg or fish. Mark which cheeses are hard or

pasteurised and which are soft ripened or unpasteurised, and say which hot dishes (baked camembert) are cooked until steaming hot, so that pregnant guests (and others who need to avoid certain cheeses) can choose. The NHS list is at nhs.uk.

Allergens: a party spread easily contains milk, gluten, egg, nuts, sesame, mustard and fish (Worcestershire sauce). Ask guests in advance, keep nuts in separate dishes, and have at least one dish that suits each common dietary need.

Leftovers: cool cooked vegetables quickly (within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can estimate how much to make for a party.
- ☐ I can write a running order and cook to it.
- ☐ I can build a cold platter and a hot station.
- ☐ I label food for allergies, vegetarians and pregnant guests.
- ☐ I know how to keep and clear party food safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Cheese and Party Snacks 1 is complete. Cooking Skills: Eggs 2 and the planned Pastry courses are good companions.