

CHEVRES...FULL OF SURPRISES



Some little French superstars have just shot across the American culinary firmament. Joining other recent Franco-American favorites—quiches, croissants, and satiny Brie—chèvres have become the newest rage on the U.S. food scene. "Chèvre" simply means "goat" in French, and by extension, goat's milk cheese. The new interest derives from their distinctively tangy taste, but the creamy texture, snowy color, and firm freshness of chèvres are no disadvantage.

The flavor depends largely on age. Younger cheeses have a tangy innocence; ripier cheeses, a surprising zinginess. All offer a characteristic slightly peppery aroma and taste—a bit pungent, a bit piquant. For your first adventure with chèvre, try a subtly tangy young cheese and we predict love at first bite. The nippier, more mature chèvres are a cultivated taste for cheese lovers. A nibble of chèvre, a sip of fine French wine, and the taste buds are startled and wonderfully awake.

Chèvres has another distinction. Like the mischievous Greek gods, they turn up in a variety of forms. The French make goat's milk cheeses: pyramids, cylinders, ovals, discs, spheres and "buttons." Many are small—less than four inches across—and resemble snowy little puddings. Some chèvres are beautifully wrapped in chestnut leaves to keep them moist; some are rolled in rosemary, anise or fennel; some are dusted with edible vegetable ash (cendre). These "coatings" add their own flavor nuance to the cheese.

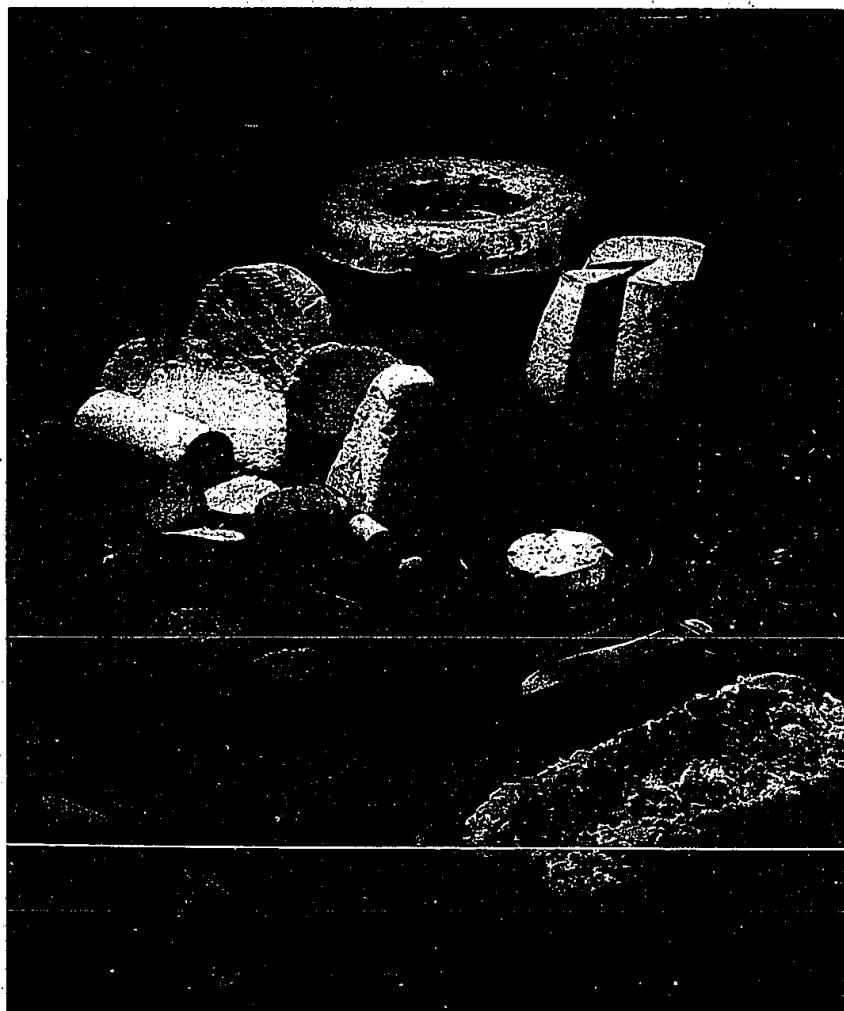
The sturdy, rustic character of chèvres is part of their charm. In France, the world's leading producer of goat's milk cheeses, small farms are the principal source of supply—the goatish nature doesn't lend itself to mass-production techniques. The cow population far exceeds the goat population, and the average goat offers only two to three quarts of milk daily; a cow yields between 10 and 20. Furthermore, goats are quirky. While they derive nourishment from terrain that dismay their bovine cousins, changes in weather, handling, environment or feeding make them nervous and effect milk output.

Versatile little chèvres may be consumed in a wide variety of pleasing ways. Sprinkle on crusty French baguettes after dinner, or on breakfast toast. Serve goat's milk cheese with cocktails, crumble it into salad, or offer it for le snack anytime. Great cookery ingredients, too. Chèvre and Leek Tart, made in a flaky puff-pastry shell, is the perfect accompaniment to drinks; it also serves as an appetizer course or main dish for lunch. Salade aux Crottins de Chavignol teams chèvre with greens, crumbled bacon, biscotte crumbs and Herbes de Provence for added flavor. Also chèvre turns out one of the fastest soufflés you have ever set tooth to, as well as an unusual hot-bread made with crumbled bacon. Cold lamb or roast beef combine with chèvre in a splendid salad made with endive, French cornichons (midget gherkin pickles), chopped fresh dill and a spirited dressing enlivened with Dijon mustard.

In France, in the regions where chèvres are produced, local wines are invariably the accompaniment—and, in general, these wines are white. For your own chèvre and wine tasting, you might want to follow the French classic combinations: in the Loire Valley style, local chèvres team with Sancerre, Vouvray, Muscadet. Further east in Burgundy, Montrachet cheese turns up with Mâcon Blanche or the famous whites of the Côte de Beaune, Meursault and Montrachet. For tangier, more mature chèvres, try medium-bodied red wines such as those from the sunny vineyards of the Côtes du Rhône.

Should you choose other wines, simply keep in mind the usual rule of thumb about wines and cheeses—lighter wines with more delicate cheeses, more robust wines with stronger cheeses. And as for all cheeses, serve chèvres at room temperature. They store beautifully and will keep well when properly wrapped in the refrigerator; chèvres are the perfect cheeses for summer picnics and other tote-to-the-spot occasions.

More and more chèvres are being imported from France into the U.S., and the French keep coming up with innovations, for example, Camembert. Long a favorite on our own shores, it is now being produced with goat's milk and marketed as Camembert Chèvre. Try any of the cheeses illustrated in the photograph or opt for what your cheese-seller offers—and treat your taste buds to the distinctive pleasure of these beloved French favorites.



FRENCH CHEVRE DISPLAY

Clockwise from top left: **LA COROLLE CHEVRE**—Tangy flavor, dry texture, crown-shaped. Made in the Pyrenees in the south of France. **DOLMEN DE BOUGON**—Tangy flavor, dry texture, from the Polou region of the Pyrenees. **CROTTIN DE CHAVIGNOL**—Small tangy disc, marketed in regional herms (baskets) and some plastic baskets. **MONTRACHET**—Mild, creamy, long, one-canted with salt, the other plain, specialty from Burgundy. **GENDRE ROUERGUE**—From the south of France, mild and creamy, salted with ash. **CAMEMBERT CHEVRE**—Medium-mild flavor with soft, creamy texture. **LEZAY**—Mild to tangy large log with an edible orange or ash coating. **POULIGNY ST. PIERRE**—Tangy, taste, medium-dry texture, pyramid shape from the Loire Valley. **Foreground:** Chèvre and Leek Tart on wicker tray, Salade aux Crottins de Chavignol in wooden bowl.

SALADE AUX CROTTINS DE CHAVIGNOL

(Makes about 4 servings)

4 Crottins de Chavignol chèvre (French goat's milk cheese)
1 tsp. Herbes de Provence
French olive oil (about 1/2 cup)
4 cups bite-size radicchio or arugula greens

8 slices bacon
1 egg, well-beaten
1/2 cup French biscotte crumbs
1/3 cup French red wine vinegar

Place 4 Crottins in small bowl and top with herbs and oil. Refrigerate for few days. Wash, drain and chill greens. Fry bacon until crisp, drain on absorbent paper and crumble. Drain Crottins and reserve oil. Wipe dry with paper towels. Dip Crottins in egg and then into crumbs. Place them under broiler and broil 3 to 4 minutes or until slightly melted and hot. Surround Crottins with greens on serving plate. Sprinkle with bacon. Beat reserved oil with vinegar until thick and pour evenly over salad. Serve at once.

CHEVRE AND LAMB SALAD

(Makes about 4 servings)

Salad:
3 cups thinly sliced rare cold lamb (for roast beef)
6 oz. coarsely crumbled chèvre (French goat's milk cheese)
2 endives, trimmed and separated into leaves

1 tsp. sliced celery
2 T. chopped fresh dill
1 tsp. salt
1/2 cup sliced cornichons (French midget gherkins)
1 tsp. Dijon mustard

Dressing:
3/4 cup French peanut oil
1/4 cup French red wine vinegar
1 tsp. salt
1 T. each horseradish, Dijon mustard

Combine all salad ingredients and toss lightly. Cover and chill. Combine dressing ingredients and beat until thick. Let stand at room temperature for 2 hours. When ready to serve, beat dressing again until thick and pour evenly over salad. Serve at once.

SOUFFLE AU FROMAGE DE CHEVRE

(Makes 4 to 6 servings)

6 T. unsalted butter
1/3 cup flour
1-1/2 cups half and half
1 cup (1/2 pint) heavy cream
1/4 tsp. freshly ground pepper

Dash nutmeg and cayenne
1/2 tsp. Herbes de Provence
3 egg yolks
6 oz. crumbled chèvre (French goat's milk cheese)
6 egg whites, stiffly beaten

In saucepan, melt butter and stir in flour. Gradually stir in half and half, cream, pepper, nutmeg, cayenne and Herbes de Provence. Stir over medium heat until sauce bubbles and thickens. Stir over low heat for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and beat hot sauce slowly into egg yolks. Stir in cheese. Cool. Fold in egg whites. Pour mixture into 1-1/2 quart souffle dish. Bake in preheated moderate oven (350° F.) for 40 to 45 minutes or until puffed and brown. Serve at once.

GATEAU AU FROMAGE DE CHEVRE

(Makes 8 to 10 servings)

2 cups unsifted all-purpose flour
1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1/2 tsp. salt
3/4 cup confectioners' sugar
1/4 cup vegetable shortening
1/4 cup soft butter
3 egg yolks

1 cup plain yogurt
8 oz. crumbled chèvre (French goat's milk cheese)
1/2 cup grated hard cheese, such as French Gruyère
1/2 cup crumbled crisp bacon
2 tsp. baking soda

Combine flours, salt, sugar in saucepan. Add shortening, butter, egg yolks and yogurt. Blend well. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly for 10 minutes or until shortening and butter are melted and dough is thick. Cool. Stir in cheese, bacon, baking soda. Spoon mixture into well-greased 1-1/2 quart decorative mold. Bake in preheated moderate oven (375° F.) for 40 to 45 minutes or until richly brown. Unmold and cool. Cut into thin wedges and serve with whipped butter.



CHEVRE AND LEEK TART

(Makes 2 tarts, 5x10 inches)

1 package (17-1/4 oz.) frozen puff pastry sheets
4 cups sliced leeks
1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup sour cream
Salt and pepper
Pinch curry powder
1 lb. crumbled chèvre (French goat's milk cheese)
Thinly sliced leeks

Thaw pastry for 20 minutes, then unfold sheets. Cut one sheet into two 5x10 inch oblongs. Place on cookie sheet. Cut remaining sheet into 6 strips. Put 4 strips on long sides of pastry oblongs brushing edges with water to hold them in place. Cut remaining strips into halves crosswise and place them on short sides of both oblongs. Bake in preheated moderate oven (375° F.) for 30 to 35 minutes or until puffed and richly brown. While tart shells are in oven, sauté leeks in butter for 10 minutes. Stir in sour cream, salt and pepper to taste. Add curry powder. Remove baked tart shells from oven and spread leeks evenly in bottom of shells. Top with chèvre. Replace in oven for 8 to 10 minutes. Serve hot, sprinkled with leeks.