Acid: A descriptive term for cheese with a pleasant tang and sourish flavor due to a concentration of acid. By contrast, a cheese with a sharp or biting, sour taste indicates an excessive concentration of acid which is a defect.

Acrid: A term used to characterize cheese that is sharp, bitter or irritating in taste or smell.

Affine: (1) The French word for "to finish or refine." A washed-rind cheese, for example, may be affine au marc de Bourgogne which means the rind has been washed with marc, a white brandy made from grape pomace, during curing. (2) The process of curing cheeses. (3) One who finishes or cures cheese would be an affiner.

Aftertaste: The last flavor sensation perceived after tasting a cheese. Pronounced aftertastes usually detract from the pleasure of a cheese.

Aged: Generally, a cheese that has been cured longer than six months. Aged cheeses are characterized as having more pronounced and fuller, sometimes sharper flavors than medium-aged or current-aged cheeses.

Aging: Often referred to as curing or ripening, aging is the process of holding cheeses in carefully controlled environments to allow the development of microorganisms which usually accentuate the basic cheese flavors. See Curing and Ripening.

American: A descriptive term used to identify the group of American-type cheeses which includes Cheddar, Colby, granular or stirred-curd and washed or soaked-curd cheeses. Monterey Jack is also included in this group.

Ammoniated or Ammoniacal: A term describing cheese that either smells or tastes of ammonia as a result of being overripe or mishandled, i.e., held at fluctuating temperatures. This condition may afflict the rinds of cheese varieties with white mold (bloomy) rinds, such as Brie, Camembert and Chevres. A hint of ammonia is not objectionable, but heavy ammoniation is.

Annatto: A natural vegetable dye used to give many cheese varieties, especially the Cheddars, a yellow-orange hue. Annatto is tasteless and is not a preservative.

Appearance: A term referring to all visual assessments of cheese from its wrapping, rind, color and texture to how it looks when handled, broken or cut.

Aroma: A general term for the odor or scent of cheese. Cheese may lack aroma or display aromas, which range from faint to pronounced, depending upon the cheese variety. Aroma is closely allied to flavor, although cheese with a distinct odor may exhibit a mild flavor while cheese lacking odor may present a strong flavor. Aromas may also specify particular tastes or scents, such as fruity, earthy, oily and nutty. The cheese rind may have a different odor than its interior. The aroma of any cheese is most distinctive when the cheese is first cut into.

Aromatic: A descriptive term for cheeses with distinct, pronounced aromas.

Assertive: A term indicating the presence of a pronounced taste or aroma.

Astringent: A term descriptive of a harsh taste with a puckery, almost medicinal quality.

Baby: A smaller quantity of cheese which has been formed into a mini-wheel or cylinder-like shape.

Barry or Barnyardy: A descriptive term referring to strong farm-related aromas. Sometimes also called cowy. This characterization does not always indicate a negative quality.

Barrel: A style of Cheddar cheese specifically produced for the manufacture of Pasteurized Process cheese.

Basic Ingredient: A term usually referring to the milk source from which a cheese is made, such as cow's milk, ewe's milk or goat's milk. Rennet, cultures or enzymes and salt are also considered basic ingredients of cheese.

Beestings: The first milk a cow gives after calving. Very high in protein, beestings is used in Spain for the production of Armada, a strong semi-firm cheese.

Bitter: An unpleasant, biting flavor usually an after-taste. A bitter aftertaste is sometimes associated with variations in manufacturing and curing or aging procedures. It is more prevalent in cured cheeses having higher moisture contents. Bitterness is often confused with astringency. True bitterness is a sensation that is typified by the aftertaste of grapefruit peel.

Bleu: The French word for blue that is used in reference to the Blue-veined cheese varieties.

Block: The most common style of cheese produced for wholesale distribution. Descriptive of the size and shape of cheese before it is cut for distribution and sale. It is recognized as one of the major styles of natural cheese and is aged in 20, 40, 60 or 640 pound blocks.
Glossary of Cheese Terms

Bloomy Rind: A descriptive term for an edible cheese rind (crust) that is covered with a harmless, flavor-producing growth of white penicillium mold. The bloomy rind is formed by spraying the cheese surface with spores of Penicillium candidum mold before curing. Occasionally, brown, pink or red specks are interspersed through the white mold as it ages or cures. Bloomy-rind cheeses, such as Brie, Camembert and some Chevres, are classified as soft-ripened.

Blue-Veined: A characteristic of cheese varieties that develop blue or green streaks of harmless, flavor-producing mold throughout the interior. Generally, veining gives cheese an assertive and piquant flavor.

Body: The physical attributes of cheese when touched, handled, cut or eaten. The body may feel rubbery, firm, elastic, soft, resilient, yielding, supple, oily, etc. When rolled between the fingers or cut, it may appear waxy or crumbly. It’s “mouthfeel” may be grainy or creamy. A cheese also may be felt to determine its condition of ripeness.

Brine: A salt-and-water solution in which some cheese varieties are washed or dipped during the cheesemaking process. Certain cheeses, such as Feta, are packed or stored in brine.

Brining: A step in the manufacture of some cheese varieties where the whole cheese is floated briefly in a brine solution. Brining is common in the production of Mozzarella, Provolone, Swiss, Parmesan and Romano cheeses.

Broken Down: This term refers to a change in the texture of cheese. For example, cheese may change from a firm, smooth or coarse, curdy or rubbery texture to a waxy (similar to cold butter), mealy or pasty texture.

Brushed: During the curing process, washed-rind cheese varieties are “brushed” with liquids such as brine, beer, wine or brandy to maintain a moist rind and impart distinctive, earthy flavors. Parmesan and other hard cheeses may be brushed or rubbed with a vegetable oil.

Bulk Cheese: Cheese in its original manufactured form, such as a 40-pound block of Cheddar.

Buttermilk: The sour liquid which remains after churning butter from cultured cream. The liquid remaining after churning sweet cream is sweet cream buttermilk.

Buttery: A descriptive term for cheese with a high fat content, such as the double and triple creams, or cheese with a sweet flavor and creamy texture reminiscent of butter.

Casein: The principal protein in milk. During the cheesemaking process, casein solidifies, curdles or coagulates into cheese through the action of rennet.

Catch Weights: The variable weights of individual pieces of cheese. For example, a 5-pound loaf of Muenster may be slightly over or under 5 pounds.

Chalky (Color): A desirable attribute referring to the true white color or smooth, fine-grained texture of older Chevres and young Brie. However, a chalky appearance on the surface is undesirable in many cheese varieties, such as Cheddar.

Chalky (Mouthfeel): A dry, grainy sensation that is usually caused by insoluble proteins. Sometimes also described as powdery. Generally not a desirable characteristic.

Cheddar-Type: A term used to classify cheeses that share characteristics exemplified by Cheddar which may include the process of manufacture, consistency, texture, odor or flavor. Colby is a Cheddar-type cheese.

Cheddaring: The process used in making cheddar whereby piles of small curds, that have been separated from the whey, are knit together and cut into slabs. The slabs are then repeatedly turned over and stacked to help drain additional whey and aid in the development of the proper acidity (pH) and body of the cheese. These slabs are then cut or milled into curd and placed in the cheese mold and pressed.

Chemical: A descriptive term for a cheese aroma or flavor which usually indicates improper manufacture or contamination with foreign materials.

Chevres: The plural form of the French word for goat which was originally used to classify all cheese varieties made from French goat’s milk, but now commonly refers to all goat cheeses.

Clean: (1) A descriptive term for cheese that is free of unpleasant aromas, off flavors and uncharacteristic textures. (2) A lack of lingering aftertaste when eating cheese, i.e., a clean finish.

Close: A descriptive term for cheese with a smooth, tight texture, such as Cheddar. A close texture contains few, if any, mechanical holes. A cheese with small holes, like Colby, is characterized as open.

Coagulation (Curdling): A step in cheese manufacture when milk’s protein, casein, is clotted by the action of rennet or acids.

Code Date: A date stamped on a package of cheese that is used to determine the age and quality state of the product. It may be a pull date, pack date, or sell-by date.

Comminuted: Breaking down or grinding cheese into small particles through a mechanical, cutting action. Cheese that has been comminuted is used in the manufacture of Cold Pack cheese.
GLOSSARY OF CHEESE TERMS

Cold Pack (Club Cheese): A blend made from different batches of cheeses of the same variety, or two or more varieties of mild and sharp natural cheese which have been ground (commingled). Cold Pack is not heat treated or cooked at the time of packaging like processed cheese.

Color: The color of the rind and the interior of any cheese is an indication of its variety, condition and quality. In all cases, the color should be characteristic of the cheese type. Cheese colors naturally range from snow-white to deep yellow. Orange cheeses, such as Cheddar, are colored with annatto — a tasteless, odorless natural vegetable dye — during manufacturing.

Consistency: The degree of hardness or softness of cheese. Classifications of cheese by consistency include: soft, semi-soft, semi-firm, firm and hard.

Cooked: (1) Nearly all milk is heated or warmed to some degree during cheesemaking; however, the term cooked is reserved for those varieties whose curd is heated in order to regulate moisture content and degree of hardness. Parmesan curds, for example, are cooked at a higher temperature than Cheddar curds. (2) As a tasting term, cooked refers to a flavor aroma associated with the use of over-pasteurized milk.

Cowy: See Barny.

Creams, Single, Double or Triple: A classification of cheese derived from the butterfat content on a dry matter basis. Single Creams contain at least 50% butterfat in the cheese solids (dry matter); Double Creams contain at least 60% butterfat; and Triple Creams contain at least 70% butterfat. See Milkfat Content and Milkfat in the Dry Matter (FDM).

Creamy: A descriptive term for cheese texture or taste. Creamy texture is soft, spreadable and, in some cases, runny. Creamy flavors are characterized as rich and are associated with cream-enriched cheeses, such as double or triple creams. Creamy may also refer to color.

Crumbly: A descriptive term for cheese that is easily broken into chunks or falls apart when cut, such as Blue cheese. An excessively crumbly texture indicates dryness. Cheese that has been frozen may become crumbly or grainy.

Culture: See Starter.

Curd: Curdled milk from which cheese is made.

Curdling: See Coagulation.

Curing: The method, conditions and treatment from manufacturing to market, such as temperature, humidity and sanitation, that assist in giving the final cheese product the distinction of its variety. Sometimes used synonymously with aging and ripening. See Aging and Ripening.

Current (Young): Generally, semi-firm, firm or hard cheese varieties that have been cured for two weeks to 30 days. Such cheeses usually have mild flavors.

Daisy: A cheese style, traditionally a 22-pound wheel of Cheddar, which has been coated with wax and cheesecloth.

Defect: Any less-than-ideal quality factor in a cheese. Sometimes a factor found in cheese due to improper manufacture, handling or contamination. Defects can refer to packaging, finish, surface, texture or taste.

Double Cream: The French term for cheese containing from 60 to 74 percent butterfat in the cheese solids (dry matter). The average cheese has a 40 to 50 percent fat content.

Dry Matter: All the components of cheese (solids) excluding moisture (water). Dry matter includes proteins, milkfat, milk sugars and minerals.

Dutch-Type: A classification of cheese varieties that share similar characteristics, such as in methods of manufacture, consistency, texture, smell or taste, with cheeses produced in the Netherlands. Edam and Gouda are considered Dutch-type cheeses. Tilsit may appear under this classification, although it is not produced predominantly in Holland.

Earthy: A descriptive term for cheese varieties with rustic, hearty flavors and aromas. Cheese flavor compounds in this category share a common occurrence with those actually present in freshly-plowed earth or forest litter. Goat, sheep and monastery-type cheeses may be characterized as earthy and exhibit assertive flavor and aroma.

Emmentaler: The Swiss word for Swiss cheese.

Emulsifier: A substance or mixture that is used in the production of processed cheese to create its smooth body and texture. It is composed of salts of common food acids.

Eye: A void or hole within cheese that is caused by the formation of trapped gas, as a result of fermentation, during the curing process. The presence of eyes is typical of cheeses in the Swiss group and can range from pin sized to pea size or larger.

Family (Group): A term for cheese varieties that share similar characteristics.
Fat Content: The amount of butterfat/fat in any cheese. Fat content is determined by analyzing the fat in the dry matter of cheese. The fat is expressed as a percentage of the entire dry matter. See Dry Matter.

Feed: A descriptive term for cheese that exhibits an odor or taste that is directly related to the particular feed consumed by a cow or other animal before milking. The aroma or flavor may be unpleasant if the feed was turnips, or intriguing if the feed was apples or mountain clover.

Ferme (Fermier): The French term for farm-produced cheeses.

Fermented: An aroma reminiscent of yeast or alcoholic fermentations.

Filled: A descriptive term for cheese from which all butterfat has been removed and in its place a vegetable oil has been used as a substitute. Filled cheese also is referred to as imitation.

Finish: (1) The process of finishing, refining, or curing cheese to desired ripeness. Soft-ripened cheeses are sprayed on the surface with a harmless white mold (Penicillium Candidum) whose growth helps ripen the cheese. Depending upon cheese variety, other finishing methods include washing the rinds of cheeses and the daily turning of cheeses. Temperature and humidity are tightly controlled during the finishing process. (2) The way a cheese is packaged, such as a hard natural rind, a bandage of cheese cloth and wax or vacuum packaging may be referred to as its finish. (3) The aftertaste of cheese may be described as having a clean finish, bitter finish, sour finish, earthy finish, and so forth.

Firm: A classification of cheese varieties which exhibit a relatively inelastic and unyielding texture. Cheddar and Swiss are examples of firm cheeses.

Fishy: A descriptive term referring to the unpleasant flavor of overripe, high moisture cheese varieties. Often is associated with ammonia flavors.

Flaky: A descriptive term for cheese that breaks into flakes when cut. A flaky quality is typical of Parmesan, Romano, Asiago and Cheddar when aged over 10-12 months.

Flat: (1) A descriptive term for tasteless cheese which normally yields a distinct flavor. Cheese with reduced levels of sodium and salt is often referred to as flat. (2) A style of Cheddar weighing from 35-37 pounds which has been coated with wax and cheese cloth.

Flavor: A general term for the taste a cheese presents as it is eaten. Flavor is detected in the mouth and also by the nose. Flavors, in order of ascending aggressiveness, are described as faint (fleeting), mild (light or bland), pronounced (distinct) or strong (intense). Flavors may also be described by the tastes they resemble such as nutty, salty, buttery, fruity and peppery. Flavor is categorized by aftertastes as well as by initial taste.

Fondue: The French word for process cheese. This term should not be confused with “Fondue,” a Swiss dish often made with cheese. See Pasteurized Process Cheese.

Force Ripening: A method of speeding the ripening of a cheese by the application of a warmer environment than normal to naturally ripen the cheese. The cheese may be force ripened at room temperature or in a cooler set at a higher than normal temperature. Ripening may also be accelerated by modifying the enzymes. These cheeses are used primarily in processed cheese and as a food ingredient.

Foreign Flavor: See Chemical.

Formaggio: The Italian word for cheese.

Fresh: A term typically used to classify cheese varieties that have not been cured, such as Mascarpone, Cottage Cheese, Cream Cheese or Ricotta. Cheeses that have been cured for very short periods, such as Feta, may also be classified as fresh.

Fresh Mozzarella: A soft Mozzarella, with a very high moisture content, that is meant to be eaten soon after it is produced. In Italy, balls (bocconcini) of fresh Mozzarella are stored in water and usually consumed the same day they are made. Due to high moisture content, fresh Mozzarella has a very short shelf life.

Fromage: The French word for cheese.

Fruity: A descriptive term for the sweet, fragrant aroma or flavor which is characteristic of certain semi-soft cheeses, such as Foug De Montagne or American Munster and some hard mountain cheese varieties. Baby Swiss and some Cheddars also present a fruity quality.

Gamey: A descriptive term for cheeses with strong flavors and penetrating aromas.

Gassy: A descriptive term for cheeses in packaging which becomes bloated. This may be air as a result of an increase in holding temperature or altitude, or it may indicate microbial production of carbon dioxide.

Goat: A classification of cheese made from goat’s milk.

Goaty: Distinctive flavor of cheeses made from goat’s milk.
Grainy: (1) A descriptive term for gritty texture which is desirable in certain hard-grating cheeses, though not to the point of mealliness. Parmesan and Romano exhibit a granular or grainy texture. (2) A flavor term that may be used to describe grain-like (wheat) flavors that occur as the result of ripening.

Grana: The Italian term for hard-grating cheese. Parmesan, Romano, Asiago, Parmigiano-Reggiano, Grana Padano and Sapsago are among the grana-type cheese varieties.

Grassy: A descriptive term for cheese with a weedy taste that is related to the type of feed a cow has consumed, such as silage, bitterweed, leeks or onions, prior to milking. See Feed.

Green: Cheese that is immature or young. In this context, green does not refer to Sapsago which sometimes is called “Green cheese” because of its color.

Gummy: A descriptive term for the overly plastic, sticky texture of some soft cheese varieties, especially processed types. Gummy also refers to overripe rinds that have become sticky.

Hard: A classification of cheese based upon texture. Parmesan is a hard cheese.

Hard-Grating: A descriptive term for cheeses, such as Parmesan, Romano, and Asiago that are well-aged, easily grated and primarily used in cooking. See Grana.

Hole: Similar to “eyes” characteristic of Swiss cheese but smaller. Cheese varieties such as Havarti or Pyrenees exhibit small pin holes which create a lacy texture and appearance.

Imitation Pasteurized Process Cheese Spread: A cheese that possesses all the properties of pasteurized process cheese spread except the butterfat content is significantly lower than federal standards allow for labeling as a cheese spread.

Intense: A descriptive term for cheese with strong, concentrated aromas and flavors.

Interior: The cheese inside a rind or crust which in certain cheeses is also referred to as paste (Brie).

Kaas: The Dutch word for cheese.

Kase: The German word for cheese.

Lactic: (1) A general description applied to cheese exhibiting a clean, wholesome, milky and slightly acidic flavor or aroma. (2) The type of organisms included in starter cultures for cheesemaking.

Lait Cru: The French term for raw or unpasteurized milk.

Laiterie or Laitier: The French words for dairy farmer or dairyman which appear on French cheeses made in a creamery or factory. See Ferme.

Lipase: (1) An enzyme found in raw milk and also produced by microorganisms that splits fat molecules into fatty acids which cause flavor. (2) Lipase flavor is a term also used to describe rancidity, especially where these flavors are desired in cheeses. See Rancid.

Marc: The white brandy or eau de vie made from grape pomace. Marc may be used as a solution for curing washed-rind cheese.

Mammouth: A style of cheese, usually Cheddar, weighing between 75 to 12,000 pounds.

Matieres Grasses: The French term for milkfat in dry matter.

Mechanical Holes: Small, irregular openings in the body of cheese that are caused by manufacturing method and not by gas fermentation. Colby, Brick, Muenster and Monterey Jack are varieties with natural, mechanical openings. See Open.

Medium-Aged (Mellow): Generally, semi-firm, firm or hard cheeses that have been cured for three to six months. Medium-aged cheeses are usually mellow and smooth-textured. Frequently used in regard to Cheddars.

Mild (Young): A descriptive term for light, unpronounced flavors. Mild also refers to young, briefly-aged Cheddars.

Milkfat Content: The fat content of cheese expressed as a percentage of the total cheese weight. Milkfat content depends upon the richness of milk used in cheesemaking and how much moisture is lost during ripening.

Milkfat in the Dry Matter (FDM): The fat content of cheese expressed as a percentage of the total solids of cheese. Most cheeses are in the range of 45–55 percent milkfat in the dry matter because the dry matter stays constant in a unit of cheese while moisture content in that cheese may vary.

Moisture Content: See Fat Content.

Mold: (1) A condition created by the growth of various fungi during ripening that also contributes to the individual character of cheese. Surface molds ripen from the rind inward. Internal molds, such as those used for Blue cheese, ripen throughout the cheese. A moldy character can be clean and attractive or unpleasantly musty or ammoniated. (2) Mold also refers to the fungus itself. (3) A hoop or container that cheese is shaped in.

Mouthfeel: See Texture.
GLOSSARY OF CHEESE TERMS

Monastery-Type: A term used to classify cheeses that originated and are still produced in the monasteries of France, such as Port du Salut. Monastery-type also refers to other cheese varieties with similar attributes and may also include a variety of washed rind cheeses.

Mottled: A defect in cheese appearance that is characterized by an irregular, splotchy color on the rind or interior.

Mushroomy: A descriptive term for ripened cheese, such as Brie, with an aroma and flavor that is similar to the clean, pleasant fragrance of mushrooms. The flavor is produced by the surface mold which is actually related to the commercial mushrooms. A mushroom aroma may also be detected in other soft or semi-soft varieties.

Natural: (1) A general classification for cheese that is made directly from milk. Whether the milk is pasteurized or unpasteurized has no bearing on the designation as “natural.” (2) Refers to the cheesemaking process whereby cheese is made directly from milk by coagulating or curdling the milk, stirring and heating the curd, draining the whey and collecting or pressing the curd.

Natural Rind: A rind that develops naturally on the cheese exterior through drying while ripening without the aid of ripening agents or washing. Most semi-firm or hard cheeses have natural rinds that may be thin like that of bandaged Cheddar or thick like that of Parmesan, Pecorino Romano and wheel Swiss, Emmentaler.

Nutty: A descriptive term for cheese with a nut-like flavor as is characteristic of Swiss-types. Cheddars may exhibit a flavor reminiscent of walnuts; fresh Goat cheese and Gruyere are said to resemble the taste of hazelnuts. The flavor compounds that cause these sensations are actually found in nuts.

Off: A term referring to undesirable flavor or odor taints that are too faint or ill-defined to be more precisely characterized.

Oily: A descriptive term that may refer to texture, aroma and flavor. Cheese held out of refrigeration for extended periods may also appear oily.

Open: A term applied to cheese varieties containing small, mechanical holes that develop as a result of the manufacturing process. The holes may be small or large, densely patterned or randomly scattered and irregular in shape. The blue mold that grows in Blue cheese forms around the openings in the lightly pressed curd. Air is introduced through punctures made with steel pins into the cheese. (See Mechanical Holes) Pin holes are not to be confused with the open eyes in Swiss-type cheeses which are caused by fermentation. See Close.

Ost: The Scandinavian word for cheese.

Overripe: A term descriptive of cheese that has passed its ideal state of ripeness.

Pack Date: A code date put on cheese to indicate the date the cheese was packed and shipped by the manufacturer.

Paraffin: A wax coating applied to the rinds of some cheese varieties for both protection during export and extended lifespans. Paraffin may be clear, black, yellow or red.

Part-Skim: A term used to denote the manufacture of a cheese, such as Mozzarella, with partly skimmed milk. This yields a lower-fat cheese that may have desirable properties compared to the full-fat cheeses. See Skimmed Milk.

Pasta Filata: Translated literally from Italian, “to spin paste or threads.” Pasta Filata refers to a type of cheese where curds are heated and then stretched or kneaded before being molded into the desired shape. The resulting cheese has great elasticity and stretches when cooked or melted. Cheeses in this family include Mozzarella, Provolone, and Sting.

Paste: A descriptive term for the interior texture of soft-ripened cheeses, such as Brie, that exhibit a semi-soft to runny consistency.

Pasteurization: The process of heating milk to a specific temperature for a specific period of time in order to destroy any disease-producing bacteria and check the activity of fermentative bacteria. See Pasteurized.

Pasteurized: A term describing milk that has been heat-treated to destroy bacteria. Most factory-produced cheeses are made from pasteurized milk to ensure greater control over quality and more uniform consistency. Processed cheeses also may be pasteurized to check further ripening.

Pasteurized Process Cheese: A blend of fresh and aged natural cheeses that have been shredded, mixed and heated (cooked) with an addition of an emulsifier salt, after which no further ripening occurs.

Pasteurized Process Cheese Food: A variation of Pasteurized Process cheese which contains less fat and has a higher moisture content. It differs from process cheese in that either nonfat dry milk or whey solids and water have been added, thus reducing the percentage of actual cheese in the finished product.

Pasteurized Process Cheese Spread: A variation of Pasteurized Process cheese which contains a higher moisture content and lower milkfat content than process cheese food. A stabilizer is added to prevent separation of ingredients.

Pâte: The French word for paste.
Penicillium: Principal genus of fungi used to develop molds on certain cheese varieties during ripening. *Penicillium candidum* is used to develop many soft-ripened cheeses such as Brie; *Penicillium glaucum* or *roqueforti* are used for Gorgonzola and Roquefort cheeses, respectively.

Peppery: A descriptive term for cheese with a sharp, pepper flavor nuance. Aged Cheddar and aged Goat cheese may be described as peppery.

Persille: The French translation for “parsleyed” which refers to delicately veined Blue varieties, such as Roquefort, Blue and Stilton, where the mold resembles sprigs of parsley.

Pickled Cheese: A term which may be used to classify cheeses that are stored and packed in a brine solution. *Feta* is a pickled cheese.

Piquant: A descriptive term for cheese with an appealing sharpness or exhilarating accent of flavor or aroma. Aged Asiago, aged Provolone and Blue cheese are sometimes described by this term.

Plastic Curd: A classification of cheeses whose curd is heated and then kneaded to form various shapes. The Italian term for these cheese varieties is *pasta filata*. Mozzarella, Provolone and String cheese are plastic-curd type cheeses and may be described as stringlike. See Pasta Filata.

Pressed Cheese: A descriptive term for cheese whose curd has been placed in a mold and literally pressed to form the intended shape of the finished cheese. Fresh, uncurd cheese varieties such as Cream or Feta and cured cheeses such as Brick, Cheddar, Parmesan and Romano are examples of pressed cheese.

Print: A rectangular style of cheese that has been cut from a 40-pound block. Prints are normally 10-pound leaves.


Processed: A classification of cheese.

Pronounced: A descriptive term for cheese that exhibits a distinct aroma or flavor which is stronger than mild but not as powerful as intense. See Intense.

Pull Date: A code date stamped on cheese to indicate when the product should be removed from stock as being too old.

Pungent: A descriptive term for cheese with an especially poignant aroma or sharp, penetrating flavor. Limburger cheese aroma is classed as a pungent aroma.

Queso: The Spanish word for cheese.

Rancid: A term that relates to flavors caused by the release of free fatty acids from butterfat. Lipase enzymes cause the release of fatty acids. Some cheeses are not supposed to have flavors caused by fatty acids in high concentrations, such as Cheddar, while others, such as Romano, gain much of their flavor from the “rancidity” of fatty acids. In many dairy flavors excessive rancidity is considered a notable defect. See Lipase.

Raw Milk: Milk that has not undergone pasteurization.

Rennet: An extract from the membranes of calves’ stomachs which contains rennin, an enzyme that aids in coagulating milk or separating curds from whey. Rennet-like enzymes, also used commercially, are produced by selected fungi and bacteria.

Rind: The outer surface of cheese. A rind varies in texture, thickness and color. Cheeses may be rindless, display natural rinds or possess rinds that are produced by harmless mold. See Natural Rind and Bloomy Rind.

Rindless: Cheese without a rind. Some rindless varieties, such as Brick and Colby, are ripened (cured) in plastic film or another protective coating to prevent rind formation. Other cheeses, such as Feta, are rindless because they simply are not allowed to ripen.

Ripe: A descriptive term for cheese that has arrived at peak flavor through aging. The optimum period of aging varies widely among cheese varieties.

Ripening: The chemical and physical alteration of cheese during the curing process. See Curing and Aging.

Robust: A descriptive term for cheese with a very strong aroma and full, flavor.

Rubbery: A term characterizing the resilient feel and texture of a cheese. Generally, a term for cheese that is overly chewy or excessively elastic in texture.

Runny: A descriptive term for cheeses that have returned to a partially liquid state as a result of insufficient drainage of whey or exposure to excessive heat. Soft-ripened cheese varieties often become runny at the peak of ripeness or if placed in warm temperatures for long periods.

Rustic: A descriptive term for cheese with a hearty or earthy flavor and an assertive aroma. Country or mountain cheeses are sometimes referred to as rustic.

Queijo: The Portuguese word for cheese.
Salting: A step in the cheesemaking process requiring the addition of salt. Depending upon the cheese variety, salt can be added while the cheese is in curd form or rubbed on the cheese after it is pressed. Salt is used to help preserve cheese as well as to enhance its flavor. Cheese also may be soaked in a salt solution which is a process termed brining.

Salty: Most cheeses possess some degree of saltiness. Pronounced saltiness is characteristic of specific varieties, however excessive saltiness is a defect. Cheeses lacking in salt are described as dull or flat.

Satiny: A descriptive term referring to the texture and "mouthfeel" of soft, spreadable cheese varieties. A satiny texture is characteristic of perfectly ripe Brie. Also sometimes referred to as smooth, silky texture. See Silky and Velvety.

Sell-By Date: A code date put on cheese to indicate the date by which the manufacturer recommends that the cheese be sold at retail to the consumer.

Semi-Firm: A classification of cheese based upon texture. Edam and Gouda are examples of semi-firm cheese varieties.

Sharp: A descriptive flavor term referring to the fully developed flavor of aged cheeses such as Cheddar, Provolone and some Blue varieties. The flavor is actually sharp and biting, but not excessively acid or sour.

Sheep: A classification of cheese made from ewe's milk.

Sheepy: Characteristic flavor of some cheeses made from ewe's milk.

Silky: See Satiny and Velvety.

Skimmed Milk: The milk which remains after all or part of the cream containing the fat has been removed.

Smoked Cheese: Cheese that has been smoked in a process similar to smoking meat. Methods for smoking cheese include the addition of liquid smoke to the brine or smoking over identified woodchips. Smoked Cheddar, Swiss and Provolone yield a unique flavor.

Soapy: Descriptive of a taste caused by long-chain fatty acids sometimes present in cheese which is caused by excessive milkfat breakdown. See Rancid and Lipase.

Soft-Ripened: A classification of cheese based upon texture. Brie and Camembert are examples of soft-ripened cheese varieties.

Sour Milk: Milk that has been made acidic by fermentation. The predominant acid formed is lactic acid. See Starter and Lactic.

Sour: A descriptive term for cheese with an excessive acid content. However, a mild, tangy, sour flavor can be attractive in young cheeses. Tartness is the same as sourness in flavors.

Sour-Milk Cheese: Cheese that has been curdled (coagulated) by natural souring or by the addition of lactic acid bacteria. Sour-milk cheese does not use rennet for coagulation. Cottage cheese is an example of this type of cheese.

Specially Cheese: A subjective term used to classify cheeses which is of exceptional quality, notably unique or produced in limited quantities. Cheeses that are combinations of different cheese types also may be referred to as specially. For example, Blue/Brie is a soft-ripened cheese with a blue vein mold throughout.

Spiced: A term sometimes used to classify all cheese varieties containing spices, herbs or flavorings. For example, Caraway Gouda is a spiced cheese.

Spicy: A descriptive term for cheese varieties with a peppery, herby character.

Springy: A descriptive term for cheese with a resilient texture that "springs back" when gently pressed. Ripe or nearly ripe, soft-ripened varieties should be springy.

Stabilizer: An additive used to retard deterioration. A stabilizer may be natural, such as salt, or artificial.

Starter: A culture that normally consists of varying percentages of lactic acid, bacteria or mold spores, enzymes or other micro-organisms and natural chemicals which is used to speed and control the process of curdling milk during cheesemaking.

Sticky: See Gummy.

Stringlike: See Plastic Curd.

Strong: A descriptive term for cheese with a pronounced or penetrating flavor and aroma.

Style: A classification of cheese based upon its shape, size and packaging.
Supple: A term describing the body of certain cheeses when handled. Supple cheese varieties, such as Fontina, are somewhat elastic, consistent and yielding.

Surface-Ripened: A term referring to cheese that ripens from the exterior when a harmless mold, yeast or bacteria is applied to the surface. Bloomy-rind and washed-rind cheeses are surface-ripened; also referred to as soft-ripened.

Swiss-Type: A term used to classify cheeses that share the common characteristic of eyes (holes) in their interior. Eyes develop during the curing process when gas, formed through fermentation, is trapped and expands thus forming holes. The size of eyes can range from as small as a pea in Baby Swiss to the larger holes typical of Aged Swiss. The original Switzerland Swiss is known as Emmentaler.

Tangy: (1) A descriptive term that refers to a pleasing acidity or tartness which is a very distinct and somewhat penetrating flavor common to Chevres, certain Blues and less assertive Bel Paese. (2) In broad terms tangy indicates a lingering, usually acidic flavor. (3) A reference to the specific flavor of individual varieties, as in a Cheddar tang.

Tart: See Sour.

Taste: See Flavor.

Texture: A general term for the "fabric" or "feel" of cheese when touched, tasted or cut. Characteristics of cheese texture may be smooth, grainy, open or closed, creamy, flaky, dense, crumbly and so forth, depending upon the specific variety.

Tomme: Sometimes spelled Tome, this French word for cheese is native to the Haute Savoie section of France. The word precedes the names of certain cheeses such as Tomme de Savoie or Tomme de Beaumont. The Tommes have much in common with the washed-rind cheeses produced in the monasteries of France.

Topnote: A fleeting, very light aroma or flavor usually detectable when a cheese is first cut or tasted.

Triple Cream: The French term for cheese which contains more than 75 percent butterfat in the cheese solids. See Creams and Fat Content.

Tuophile: A lover of cheese. Taken from the Greek word turos (cheese) and the root phil (love).

Type: A term used to classify or categorize cheeses that share common characteristics, such as degree of firmness, texture, flavor and manufacturing procedure, with a widely known and established cheese variety.

US RDA: The abbreviation for United States Recommended Daily Allowance which refers to the nutritional contributions which foods, such as cheese, make to the diet.

Uncooked Cheese: See Cooked Cheese.

Variety: The generic name of a cheese by which it is most commonly identified such as Cheddar, Colby, Blue, etc.


Washed-Rind: A cheese rind that has been washed periodically with brine, whey, beer, cider, wine, brandy or oil during ripening. The rind is kept moist to encourage the growth of an orange-red bacteria. The bacteria may be scraped off, dried or left to further rind development. Washed-rind and bloomy-rind cheeses compose what is termed the soft-ripening (surface-ripened) classification. Limburger is a washed-rind cheese.

Waxy: A term describing the wax-like appearance of a cheese body, or its texture when tasted or cut. See Texture.

Weeping: A descriptive term referring to Swiss-type cheese whose eyes glisten with bits of moisture. This is caused by the release of moisture by proteins as they are broken down during ripening. Weeping often indicates that a cheese has achieved peak ripeness and will exhibit full flavor.

Whey: (1) The thin, watery part of milk that separates from the coagulated curds during the first step of the cheesemaking process. It still contains most of the milk sugar or lactose found in milk. (2) A classification of cheeses made predominantly from the whey obtained during the manufacture of other cheeses like Gjetost. Ricotta can be made from whey.

Whey Taint: A term used to describe off-flavors in cheeses, particularly Cheddar, which resemble soured or fermented whey. They sometimes are also known as unclean or utensil-like flavors which refers to their similarity to unwashed cheesemaking equipment that is allowed to remain at room temperature.

Whole Milk: Milk that is neither skimmed nor enriched with extra cream.

Wisconsin State Brand/Wisconsin Grade A: These grades appear on American cheeses which meet the state's highest quality. Each grade meets the same high standards and are interchangeable.

Wrapping: The exterior material used to enclose or cover cheese for protection and storage. Examples of wrapping material include leaves, plastic, cloth, paraffin and foil.

Young: See Current and Green.