

Something Old, Something New

Goat cheese has been around a long time, but it's red-hot right now

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Although goat cheese — also known as chèvre — has been made for thousands of years and was most likely one of the earliest dairy products, its popularity is only recently growing in the pizza industry. Here in the Western world, we have popularized cow's milk, mass producing it and using it in a variety of ways, including the very item at which we all make a living.

Goat's milk and goat cheese are preferred dairy products in much of the rest of the world. Because goat cheese is often made in areas where refrigeration is limited, aged goat cheeses are often heavily treated with salt to preserve them.

As a result, salt has become associated with the flavor of goat cheese, especially in the case of the heavily brined feta.

In its simplest form, goat cheese is made by allowing raw milk to naturally curdle, and then draining and pressing the curds. Other techniques use an acid (such as vinegar or lemon juice) or rennet to coagulate the milk. Soft goat cheeses are made in kitchens all over the world,

with cooks hanging bundles of cheesecloth filled with curds up in the warm kitchen for several days to drain and cure.

Goat cheese softens when exposed to heat, although it does not melt in the same way that many cow cheeses do.

Chèvre has such a unique flavor profile and quality that it can enhance your menu if you really understand its characteristics and possibilities. Let me share four different ways that goat cheese can be incorporated into your menu:

◆ I've enjoyed a fried goat cheese salad at a popular Italian chain. Soft goat cheese is rolled in crushed hazelnuts and then quickly fried for a few seconds. If left frying too long it would simply fall apart. The fried cheese is then placed on greens with an array of accompaniments like artichoke hearts, roasted red peppers and apples.

◆ Using little dollops of goat cheese on pizza is a great way to introduce chèvre to your customers. Offer it on its own as a topping, or incorporate it with other toppings to create a special Mediterranean pizza.

