

## CHEESE

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At home, I played around with the cheese for a quick version of provoleta using unsmoked domestic and imported provolone. The domestic cheese melted beautifully, but rendered out a bit of fat (which I mopped up with a paper towel). The imported sharp provolone had a saltier edge that really welcomed the salad topping. Other options I like for the provoleta include tangy Greek kasseri and mild tasting Mexican queso fresco, queso blanco and panela — all of which soften nicely when heated.

The ticket to success: the thickness of the cheese. Look for chunks that are between ¾- and 1-inch thick, so it browns and melts at the same time.

Like any good melty cheese offering, I could easily enjoy these timeless recipes as a main course with a hearty green salad and cold Mexican beer or an Argentine Malbec. Perhaps a glass of cold milk for the granddaughter — when she's ready for my cooking.

### JACK AND AVOCADO QUESADILLA TRIANGLES

Prep: 10 minutes

Cook: 5 minutes  
Makes: 2 servings

Quesadillas at their most basic. Cutting the rounds into triangles helps prevent mouth burns from hot cheese. Add crushed red pepper flakes to the cheese if you like things spicy. I would never object to chopped fresh cilantro or chives in the avocado mash.

**1 medium ripe avocado, halved, pitted**  
**¼ teaspoon salt**  
**Chopped fresh cilantro or chives, optional**  
**1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese**  
**Crushed red pepper flakes or smoked paprika, optional**  
**4 flour tortillas (6 inch)**

1. Scoop avocado pulp into a small bowl. Roughly mash with a spoon; season with salt and cilantro, if using.

2. Heat a well-seasoned or nonstick griddle over medium heat until a drop of water evaporates on contact. Add 2 tortillas in a single layer. Top each with ½ cup of the cheese, spreading it to within ½ inch of the edge. Sprinkle each with pepper flakes, if using, then a second tortilla. When the bottom tortilla is hot and a bit golden, about 1 minute, carefully flip to brown and heat the other side, about 30 seconds.

3. Transfer to a cutting board;

cut each into 6 wedges. Serve right away with the mashed avocado.

### CARAMELIZED ONION, ASPARAGUS AND GOAT CHEESE QUESADILLAS

Prep: 10 minutes  
Cook: 15 minutes  
Makes: 2 quesadillas

I also like this with the creamy soft-ripened cow's milk cheese from Dorothy's Creamery in Lena, Illinois. Brie or camembert work well too.

**2 teaspoons expeller-pressed canola, safflower or sunflower oil**  
**½ small yellow onion, very thinly sliced**  
**4 asparagus spears, chopped**  
**Salt to taste**  
**2 very fresh corn tortillas, about 6 inches in diameter**  
**3 to 4 ounces crumbled soft goat cheese**  
**Chopped fresh cilantro**  
**Roasted tomato salsa**

1. Heat a small nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add 1 teaspoon of the oil and the onion. Cook, stirring often, until onion is soft and caramelized, 6 to 8 minutes. Add asparagus; cook and stir until crisp-tender, about 2 minutes. Season with salt. Transfer to a plate.

2. Heat a nonstick or well-seasoned griddle over medium heat until a drop of water evaporates on contact. Add remaining 1 teaspoon of oil and add tortillas. Turn once to coat tortillas with oil. Heat until softened, about 30 seconds. Immediately top half of each tortilla with half of the onion mixture and half of the crumbled cheese. Fold tortillas in half to enclose the filling. Press with a flexible spatula to compact everything. Cook until tortillas crisp a bit; flip to crisp the other side, 1 to 1 ½ minutes. Serve hot sprinkled with cilantro. Pass the salsa.

*Nutrition information per serving: 231 calories, 16 g fat, 7 g saturated fat, 53 mg cholesterol, 15 g carbohydrates, 1 g sugar, 9 g protein, 209 mg sodium, 3 g fiber*

### SKILLET PROVOLONE WITH SALAD

Prep: 20 minutes  
Cook: 10 minutes  
Makes: 4 appetizer servings

The thickness of the cheese is more important here than the shape. I have used a wedge of imported provolone, squares of kasseri cheese and two half-moon-shaped pieces of domestic provolone.

All will work here, as long as they are ¾- to 1-inch thick. Cut away any rind before cooking.

**1 chunk aged provolone cheese (¾-inch thick) or 2 smaller chunks with the same thickness, totaling about 12 ounces**  
**1½ cups halved cherry tomatoes**  
**1 cup sliced baby romaine or baby salad greens**  
**1 tablespoon olive oil**  
**1 to 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar**  
**1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley**  
**1 teaspoon minced fresh oregano or ½ teaspoon dried crushed red pepperflakes, optional**  
**4 to 8 thick slices crusty bread, warmed**

1. Let cheese rest, unwrapped, at room temperature while you get everything else ready. You can leave the cheese out uncovered for several hours.

2. Shortly before serving, heat oven to 200 degrees. Mix the tomatoes and lettuce in a bowl. Season with the olive oil, vinegar and a pinch each of the parsley and oregano.

3. Turn on the exhaust fan over the stove. Heat a small (6- or 7-inch diameter) seasoned cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot. Reduce the heat to low. Add

the chunk of cheese; sprinkle with half the remaining parsley and oregano, and crushed red pepper to taste. Cook until the bottom of the cheese starts to brown and the middle starts to soften and ooze, about 3 minutes. Carefully flip the cheese with a spatula. Sprinkle with the remaining herbs and pepper flakes. Continue to cook until the bottom of the cheese is golden brown but not hard, 1 to 2 minutes.

4. Meanwhile, warm the bread on a baking sheet in the oven for a few minutes. Transfer bread to a basket; cover with a towel to keep warm.

5. Serve the hot cheese right away, straight from the skillet, topped with some of the salad. Scoop the cheese onto the bread slices and pass remaining salad.

*Nutrition information per serving: 427 calories, 27 g fat, 15 g saturated fat, 59 mg cholesterol, 21 g carbohydrates, 3 g sugar, 25 g protein, 919 mg sodium, 1 g fiber*



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146 MAIN, HALFWAY

## COMPOST

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Making compost is nothing more than assisting Mother Nature. The process can be as simple or as complicated as you like or need. I have a variety of composting methods for my backyard. The simplest is applying a mulch of dried leaves to flower or vegetable beds in fall. During winter the worms and microbes will work their magic, enriching the soil in a protected environment. My yard leaves don't get bagged up and hauled anywhere!

With food and garden waste, I have tried the large black plastic composting bin but found the size too limited for turning, or stirring, the composting material to get the microbial action going. Now I have two 4-foot-square open wire pens, side by side, and large enough to get my pitchfork in for turning. With these pens there's plenty of

room for not only my food scraps and garden waste but grass clippings, leaves, spent straw mulch and anything else I can keep from the trash can. I have a reserve of dry leaves and straw nearby to scatter on the top for layering. Some gardeners like to add compost starters or accelerators to promote fast composting. These starters can be dry or liquid microbial bacteria inoculates that increase the breakdown activity of the organic matter. I've not tried these compost boosters, simply because my methods work fine but take longer. As I write this though I'm tempted to buy that bag of compost starter!

I have another area in my yard that is a compost heap — vegetative material (larger garden waste) in a neat long pile that decomposes slowly, without any attention from me. Occasionally I'll rearrange things or spray them with a hose but otherwise do little.

With these larger, cruder compost heaps, I harvest compost at the ground level, under the pile. This way I can keep adding to the top and let everything decay on its own. When my heap gets too big I take some of the uncomposted material from it and start another one nearby.

Composting is most successful if the waste material is kept wet and is turned or stirred often, though in winter I don't turn it. Generally, the more attention one gives to the compost, the faster the results. In warm months a well-turned (every few days) and dampened pile can deliver compost in a matter of weeks. Remember too, some waste is not suitable for home composting, including: coal or charcoal ash, coated paper and cardboard, dairy products or egg, diseased or insect-ridden plants, fats, grease, lard, meat, meat or fish bones, pet feces or litter, or yard trimmings treated with chemicals.

Do put the following in your compost: cardboard (uncoated, small pieces), coffee grinds and filters, eggshells, fireplace ashes (from natural wood only), fruit and vegetable scraps, grass clippings, hair and fur, hay and straw, house plants, leaves, nutshells, sawdust, tea bags, wood chips, and yard trimmings.

When it's time to use my compost, I screen it with hardware cloth or metal mesh to remove rocks and large undecayed bits, especially if I need a fluffy top dressing or potting soil amendment. Sometimes I put a layer of unscreened compost at the bottom of planting holes prepared for transplants or young trees.

One last comment: Composting helps me considerably as I continue my commitment to organic gardening. I have no need for commercial fertilizers or pesticides. My soil is rich, my plants are healthy, I use less water (humus-rich soil doesn't dry out as quickly)

and I have few garden pests. Well, I should say few insect pests. The gophers and voles thoroughly enjoy my vegetables too! But that's another story.

You can reach Baker City Trash Talk on Facebook at @BCTrashTalk and via email at BakerCityTrashTalk@gmail.com

## MAGNOLIAS

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Imogene Cunningham devoted a large part of her life just to photographing the magnolia.

### GARDEN CHORES

- Examine shrubs for winter injury.

Prune all dead and weakened wood.

- Look for flowering dogwoods in bloom.
- Evergreen and deciduous hedges may be sheared. Prune the top narrower than the base so sunlight will reach the lower limbs.
- Begin planting summer bulbs such as caladiums, gladiolus and acidan-

thera at two-week intervals.

- Plant bare-root or potted fruits as soon as the soil can be worked.
- Remove tree wraps from fruit trees now.

If you have garden comments or questions, please write: greengardencolumn@yahoo.com Thanks for reading!

## DORY

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From some the noise was aggravating.

Because it was a nice day I decided to spend time outside pulling weeds growing in the wrong places in my yard. I found noises at a distance less irritating and I could think my own thoughts and listen to the birds sing in the trees around me.

I suppose, I thought, that I would object to that, too, if they sang too loudly in flocks overhead instead of solo, flitting here and there.

As I pulled a weed, roots and all, from a rocky place, I heard a sound of its coming through the soil and reluctantly giving up its tenacious hold, and I thought of the bur-

rowed insects and animals to whom my act of weeding was deafening to them because they lived too close to the source of my noise-making.

Sometimes we forget how our own noise affects our neighbors, I thought.

Then I realized that I now lived in a circle center of noise-makers from lawnmowers to anything else with a motor attached. Why don't manufacturers attach noise-reducers to their items, I grumbled, pulling at another weed more carefully.

Then I remembered when I lived in the country where so-called noises seemed more pleasant — birds chirping, cows mooing, clocks ticking, far-off muted sounds of the city, chickens cackling.

All of that changes when

you move to town, I decided as I defensively yanked at another weed, asking myself why the colorful yellow dandelions were considered undesirable in response to grating gear-shift vehicles in the street.

How I longed to be back on the farm where sounds were pleasant to the ear. Why did I have to live within the noise factory of town where even the sound of a rooster crowing could save my tortured soul.

And, then, as I emptied my bag of weeds into the handy garbage bin for pick up by the convenient waste truck, I thought of feeding the greens to the rabbits in their pens of long ago and my heart grew sad in that even grass was now considered garbage.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, I

heard a rooster crow. In town. Unbelievable.

I hoped no one else had heard it lest they complain about the noise. Unfortunately, it no longer crows within my hearing, ordained by city rules that outlaw the noise of some animals and fowls but not others of the more modern age. I give up these things in exchange for motor noises and the barking of dogs for the necessary conveniences and services offered by city living for someone such as I. No one else seems to notice ... except for the railroad horns.

Noise, I decided, is a state of mind that must be weighed against the necessary benefit of the majority. That we could all live beyond our noise level that irritates can only be done in our mind I decided.



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