

Delightful Food Ideas

Figs And Cheese Make An Inspiring Beginning And An Elegant Ending

(NAPSA)—Figs and cheese are one of life's most flavorful pleasures. Sweet, moist golden Calimyrna and black Mission California figs pair well with a wide variety of delectable cheeses, ranging from crumbly, sharp blue cheese to soft Brie and Camembert to firm cheddar.

Whether it's a fruit and cheese platter put together as unexpected guests arrive or a dessert course served as the finale to an elegant supper with friends, the delicious combinations of figs and cheeses are limited only by one's imagination.

When serving figs and cheese, always allow time for the cheeses (except for fresh cheeses) to come to room temperature for full flavors—about one to three hours. For a cheese and fruit platter, try selecting a fresh cheese such as goat or cream cheese, perhaps sprinkled with chopped herbs; a soft or semisoft cheese such as Brie or Camembert; a blue cheese; and a firm cheese like cheddar or Spanish Manchego. Arrange cheeses on a platter starting with the mildest or sweetest cheese and ending with the strongest-flavored cheese. Both varieties of dried California figs, golden Calimyrnas and black Missions, go well with most cheeses.

If you would like to add a wine,



Figs pair well with a wide variety of cheeses.

white wines will be easier to pair. Some red wines are good but because white wines lack tannins, they make better cheese and fruit companions. A good rule of thumb might be to match intensely flavored cheeses with bold, intensely flavored wines. A Brie, for example, goes well with Chardonnay and a blue cheese with a zinfandel.

Dried California figs are available all year round in two popular varieties, Missions and Calimyrnas. The black Missions have a soft skin and small seeds, while the Calimyrnas have a slightly nutty flavor, a golden-amber skin and larger, crunchier seeds. Flavorful and healthy, dried figs make appetizers, entrées and desserts come alive.

For more information and recipes featuring dried California figs, visit the Valley Fig Growers' Web site at www.valleyfig.com.

Fig and Gorgonzola Toasts *Makes 20 appetizers*

- 1 cup Blue Ribbon Orchard Choice or Sun-Maid Figs**
 - ¼ cup Chianti***
 - ¼ cup orange juice**
 - 1 (2 x 4-inch) strip orange peel**
 - 2 small sprigs fresh rosemary**
 - 20 baguette rounds**
 - 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil**
 - ¼ cup Gorgonzola cheese**
 - ¼ cup butter, softened**
 - 20 tiny rosemary sprigs (optional)**
- Remove stems from figs; cut each into 4 slices. Bring wine, orange juice, orange peel and rosemary to a boil in small saucepan; add fig slices. Reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes or until most of the liquid has been absorbed; set aside. Preheat oven to 450° F. Brush baguette rounds with olive oil and place on baking sheet. Bake 5 minutes or until lightly browned; let cool. Combine cheese and butter in small bowl. Spread mixture onto toasted rounds and top with fig slices. Garnish with tiny rosemary sprigs, if desired.**
- * Substitute orange juice if desired.**