

The Versatility of formage blanc & chevre

Try and go to a store and buy formage blanc – unless it is a specialty cheese shop, maybe a health food store, or a local farmer’s market, or farmstead dairy and you probably won’t find it. These days you can find plain and flavored chevre in almost every grocery store. The only difference is formage blanc is from cow milk and chevre is goat milk (delivering that little extra “tang”). The process and consistency is the same.

Did you know this is absolutely the easiest cheese to make and the most versatile whether goat or cow milk?

Why so you ask? Indulge me as I list the many ways it can be used and the traditional forms it has come in that are hard to find these days.

The base for both Alouette (minus the guar gum, etc.) and Boursin spreads is formage blanc. Read the ingredients and history here for Boursin (a little higher cream maybe or really good farmstead high fat milk) <https://cheese.com/boursin/>. Just add your favorite herbs to make your spread.

Have you ever had a recipe that called for “farmer’s cheese”? I have a favorite recipe for cheese blintzes from the veget’arain epicure book two. When I first came to Maine I could find farmer’s cheese in the local grocery stores. Then it disappeared – I haven’t found it since the mid-80’s. Once I started making cheese and doing lots of research – I found that farmer’s cheese is essentially formage blanc. Farmer’s cheese is drained longer so it is drier, not creamy, almost but not quite crumbly. The recipe at New England Cheese Making for farmer’s cheese increases the temperature to 86° and uses a drop more of rennet, cutting the curds, heating to 90°, and then lightly pressing (making the cheese firmer & drier). You can use it for any recipe calling for farmer’s cheese measure for measure.

I never make or buy ricotta because formage blanc/chevre is easier to make, the yield is greater, it has more flavor (because it is cultured), and the cheese retains more of the nutrients since the milk it is not heated to high temperatures. Just use the same amount the recipe calls for. You can also freeze them. I would use them within about 2 months if you freeze them (always freeze unflavored). The texture changes a little so you can make it smoother by adding some cream or milk.

Let’s move onto cream cheese and Neufchatel. Both are moist fresh cheeses(?). Cream cheese is higher in fat (about 7%-10%); Neufchatel claims it is 1/3 less (at 3% that is less than farmstead whole Jersey and heritage breed’s milk). The reason for the question mark after cheese is this is what they add to get it to be in a block with that particular consistency: “STABILIZERS (CAROB BEAN AND/OR XANTHAN AND/OR GUAR GUMS).” I would rather have real cheese on my bagels and in my cheese cake. When substituting formage blanc/chevre for baking use ¼ teaspoon more vanilla, a little more salt and a little less liquid.

Are there times you are rushed and need a really quick dinner? Grab some pasta, get it going on the stove, decide what flavors you are craving, (garlic, parmesan, dill, basil, oregano, marjoram, chive, etc). Take out your fromage blanc/chevre and make a quick, simple salad. When the pasta is done, drain it reserving a little pasta water, put it in a bowl, add some “wonder cheese” and herbs to taste, stir and add more cheese or pasta water to get the consistency you like. Done in about 20 minutes.

If you only make one cheese regularly make fromage blanc or chevre. Keep it in your fridge and freezer. You won't regret having an ingredient readily available that you can use to create a wholesome breakfast, lunch, dinner, appetizer, or dessert!

Bon appetite!