



Pomegranates

+ Cheese

These ruby jewels have a deep-“seeded” affection for wedges and wheels

WRITTEN BY **CHERYL STERNMAN RULE**

Pomegranates aren't just food. They're a challenge, a commitment, an opportunity. Each seed, or aril, contains multiple components: first the smooth, taut juice sac; then the bracing, sweet-tart liquid; and finally the hard, crunchy pip itself. Opening pomegranates takes effort, but the rewards—in beauty, texture, flavor, and versatility—are ample.

These ancient globular fruits (their name derives from the Latin for “seeded apple”) are native to the Middle East, with Persia their likeliest place of origin. They eventually migrated to North Africa, China, the Mediterranean, and the United States. Today, California's San Joaquin Valley is the US hub

of commercial production, with Wonderful the dominant (and aptly named) variety. Balancing the pom's high acidity with the right cheese takes skill. Whether served raw, cooked into chutney, or reduced to molasses, these crimson fruits do a variety of cheeses proud.

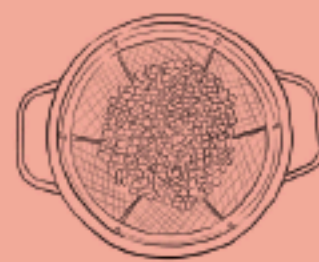
HOW TO: SEED A POMEGRANATE



1 Fill a bowl with water, and place it in the sink. Slice the pomegranate in half, and submerge one half in the bowl of water.



2 Using your hands, separate the half into several sections, and gently knock the seeds out with your fingers under the water. The seeds will sink to the bottom of the bowl, while any separated membrane will float to the top. Repeat with the second half.



3 Skim any floating pieces of membrane out of the water and discard. Using a colander, drain the seeds from the water and serve.

Raw Pomegranate Arils

When composing a cheese platter, veteran cookbook author Georgeanne Brennan—whose tomes include *Williams-Sonoma Cheese: The Definitive Guide to Cooking with Cheese* (Weldon-Owen, 2011)—favors pairing fresh pomegranates with richly flavored cheeses. One pick, the decadent Marin French Cheese Triple Crème Brie, “balances the tart aspect of the pomegranate and enhances its sweet side,” while the arils lend the soft cheese a welcome textural contrast.

Brennan also recommends Midnight Moon from Cypress Grove Chevre, a firm, aged goat's milk cheese with a “faintly nutty flavor.” To serve, present a quartered pomegranate on a cheese board, or pluck out the seeds and offer them up in a small bowl (see sidebar, left).

Marin French Cheese Triple Crème Brie + raw pomegranate arils

Cypress Grove Chevre Midnight Moon + raw pomegranate arils

Pomegranate Chutney

Thanks to vinegar, citrus, and other sources of acidity (such as tamarind), chutneys lend sour notes to pomegranates' somewhat sugary profile. Tia Keenan, author of the forthcoming book *The Art of the Cheese Plate* (Rizzoli, 2016), extols pairing the chutney with Rivers Edge Chèvre True Love, a “lightly aged goat cheese . . . bedecked with dried jasmine, lavender, and rose. The subtle floral nature of the fruit draws out the aromatics of the cheese.”

For a sheep's milk option, consider Brebis Frais from Washington State's Glendale Shepherd. Owner and cheesemaker

Lynn Swanson says this rich, buttery, spreadable cheese has a clean, refreshing quality, a worthy counterpoint to pomegranate chutney's zip.

Rivers Edge Chèvre True Love + pomegranate chutney

Glendale Shepherd Brebis Frais + pomegranate chutney

Pomegranate Molasses

Experts agree that thick, syrupy pomegranate molasses—an intense reduction of the fruit's juice, sugar, and a touch of lemon—is best suited to fattier cheeses. Keenan suggests buffalo's milk Barilotto, which she compares to ricotta salata. “Buffalo's milk is like God's custard,” she says. “It's so rich and sweet. It really does well with über-tart flavors like

pomegranate molasses, which tend to cut through the fattiness of the cheese.” Charleen Badman, chef and co-owner of FnB in Scottsdale, Ariz., proposes Pound Cake from Sugar House Creamery—its “puddinglike paste with savory qualities of green onion and fatty cultured butter” creates a worthy pairing for this regally hued elixir.

Casa Madaio Barilotto + pomegranate molasses

Sugar House Creamery Pound Cake + pomegranate molasses

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