**Best Cheeses for Backpacking**

**From Backpacker Magazine:** [*http://www.backpacker.com/test-kitchen-cheese/skills/16792*](http://www.backpacker.com/test-kitchen-cheese/skills/16792)

**Hard cheese**

* **Best for** Extended trips, hot weather, snacking, and meal topping
* **Trail worthiness** Low moisture in aged hard cheeses concentrates flavor and extends shelf life. Our test hunks stayed edible for more than two weeks in temps in the low 80s. All hard cheeses sweat oil and whey, but opt for bricks over pre-sliced or shredded; moisture is easier to manage and the shelf-life is longer.
* **Storage** Wrap in waxed paper then loose plastic wrap–not a zip-top bag. Store in a food-specific stuffsack to prevent an oily mess.
* **Top picks**
	+ **Cheddar** This fatty choice (9.5 g/ounce) is good fuel for cold or hard hikes. Pair with apples or drizzle with honey on crackers.
	+ **Mozzarella** The low-moisture, semi-dry variety is trail-worthy (the water-packed stuff is not). Haul smoked hunks and string singles, which last two weeks without refrigeration. Both melt well on pizza and get gooier and more flavorful as oils sweat.
	+ **Parmesan** Protein-dense and salty (450 mgs/ounce), this meal-topper is a recovery superfood. Pack solid pieces (trim the rind) and shave onto meals after cooking for easy cleanup.

**Soft cheese**

* **Best for** Short trips, cool weather, and gourmet camp kitchens
* **Trail worthiness** Moisture makes them mold quickly. In our tests, samples stayed edible for a week at temps below 72℉; at higher temps, they spoiled in as little as two days.
* **Storage** Purchase cryovac (vacuum-sealed) packs. After opening, seal in an airtight container and store in a cool part of your bag.
* **Top picks**
	+ **Brie** The rind of this gourmet soft cheese is edible, so there’s nothing to pack out. The creamy, sharp-flavored interior is high in salt; pair it with trail berries or jam after a sweaty hike.
	+ **Cream cheese** This low-fat spread adds body to sweet or savory sandwich wraps, and (thinned with water) can substitute for sour cream or milk in camp recipes. It’s also widely available in single-serve packets that last longer than a week without refrigeration.
	+ **Goat** Easier to digest than cow cheese, goat cheese is a good midday snack choice because it’s unlikely to upset your stomach. It’s also more delicate than many other cheeses; aim to consume it (on sandwiches or in quesadillas) in your first few trail days.

**Shelf-Stable Cheese**

* **Best for** Extended trips, warmer temperatures, resupply boxes.
* **Trail worthiness These can last in your pack for two weeks or more**
* **Storage – most of these come in individual packaging or packaged for just a few servings. Keep them wrapped in between.**
* ***Top Picks:***
	+ **Powdered** Lightweight and dehydrated, these are good toppings, but not ideal as primary ingredients. Mix blue cheese into polenta, blend cheddar with pancake mix for a savory breakfast, and use dried Parmesan on any carbs. (About $10/lb.; [americanspice.com](http://www.americanspice.com))
	+ **Processed** Downside: high salt content and a mild taste. Upside: Velveeta, Easy Cheese, American slices, and gourmet brands can last weeks. Blending during production helps “processed cheese food” stay creamy when melted (instead of separating like natural cheese). Stir 1/4 cup into two cups of cooked noodles for a rich meal, or add to soup mixes to increase calories.

**From The Cook’s Thesaurus: *http://www.foodsubs.com/Chefirm.html***

**Firm cheeses = hard cheeses = grating cheeses = grana**

***Notes:*** Cheeses usually become not only firmer but more pungent as they age, so most of the cheeses in this category pack a lot of flavor. They're often grated onto pasta dishes. Firm cheeses have a much longer shelf life than their softer counterparts.

***Varieties***:

* **Asiago (aged) *Pronuncation:*** ah-zee-AH-go ***Notes:*** This grating cheese is similar to Parmesan and Romano, but it's sweeter. It's good on pizza. There's no need to spring for a pricy Italian Asiago--our domestic knock-offs are pretty good. Don't confuse aged Asiago with the relatively obscure fresh Asiago cheese, which is semi-soft.
* **Cotija = queso anejado. *Notes:*** This is a sharp, salty white grating cheese that softens but doesn't melt when heated. **Cacique** is a well-known brand. Look for it in Hispanic markets.
* **Dry jack = dry Monterey.**  ***Notes:*** This is aged jack cheese.
* **Grana Padano. *Notes:*** This is just like Parmesan, except that it's made in a different part of Italy.
* **Gouda (aged). Notes:** As it ages, it develops a caramel sweetness and has a slight crunchiness from salt-like [calcium lactate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calcium_lactate) or [tyrosine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyrosine) crystals that form in older cheeses. After 12 months of aging, aminoacid (tyrosin) crystals start to form and gives the Old Gouda Cheese its particular taste and flavour.
* **Gruyere (Comte de Gruyere, Gruyere de Alpage). *Notes*:** The fat content is around 45%. The rind is usually a dusty-brown colour, and the internal pâte is a pale creamy yellow. The texture is relatively hard and flexible, and the taste is strong and slightly sweet.
* **Kashkaval (aged) = Kachkeval (aged). *Notes:*** Don't confuse this with ordinary Kashkaval, which is a semi-firm cheese.
* **Kefalotyri = Kefalotiri. *Notes:*** This tangy hard Greek cheese is often grated over dishes.
* **Manchego (aged) = queso Manchego Viejo. *Notes:*** Aged Manchego cheese is yellow and a terrific grating cheese. Don't confuse it with unaged Manchego cheese, which is almost white, semi-firm, and typically used as a melting cheese.
* **mimolette cheese = boule de Lille*. Notes:*** This French cheese is similar to Parmesan cheese, only it's a brilliant orange.
* **Mizithra (aged) = Mytzithra (aged). *Notes:*** Don't confuse this salty grating cheese with fresh Mizithra, which is similar to feta. This cheese is dry, crumbly, and very salty.
* **Parmesan cheese = Parmigiano.**  ***Notes:*** This firm cheese is pungent and salty, and it's terrific grated on salads, pasta, or pizzas, or served simply with figs, pears, or crusty bread. The best parmesan is the Northern Italian **Parmigiano-Reggiano**, but less pricy domestic Parmesans are also well regarded.
* **Pecorino Tuscano *Notes:*** This is a firm Italian sheep's milk cheese.
* **queso enchilada = anejo enchilado = queso anejo *Notes:*** This is a hard Mexican grating cheese that's coated with red chile paste.
* **Romano** ***Notes:*** Romano is similar to Parmesan and Asiago, only it has a nuttier, sharper, and saltier flavor. It's often grated onto pizzas and pasta dishes to add flavor. **Pecorino Romano** is made from sheep's milk, **Caprino Romano** from goat's milk, and **Vacchino Romano** from cow's milk. Domestic Romanos aren't as well-regarded as Italian Romanos.
* **Saenkanter cheese Notes: This aged Gouda has a very complex, rich flavor.**
* **Sapsago = Sap sago = Schabziger. *Notes:*** This Swiss grating cheese is colored and flavored by a clover-like herb. It's hard to find, but many seek it out as a low-fat substitute for Parmesan and Romano.
* **Sbrinz = Swiss Sbrinz. *Notes:*** This hard Swiss cheese resembles Parmesan.