



Who doesn't love a grilled cheese sandwich? The most basic recipe requires only three ingredients -- cheese, butter and bread. There are zillions of variations on the classic. You're limited only by your imagination and whatever you happen to have in your pantry.

Toasted golden in a hot skillet or browned to melty perfection under the broiler, the hallmark of a good grilled cheese sandwich is crunchy on the outside and oozing on the inside. It's the ultimate comfort food! Breakfast, lunch, dinner or midnight snack – it's always a great time for a grilled cheese sandwich! The recipes this week are delicious creations that will satisfy your grilled cheese cravings and will hopefully spark your creativity. Smile and say “cheese!”

Fresh Mozzarella, Prosciutto and Fig Jam

4 soft French or Italian Rolls

10-12 ounces fresh mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced

½ cup fig jam or fig preserves

Softened butter

Split each roll and layer with the mozzarella and prosciutto. Spread the top slices with the fig jam, then close. Lightly butter the outside of each sandwich. Heat a heavy nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Place the sandwiches in the pan and brown, turning once or twice, until the bread is crisp and the cheese has melted. Serve hot. Serves 4.

Spinach and Dill Havarti on Multigrain

2 cloves garlic, chopped

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided

1 cup cooked, chopped spinach, drained and squeezed dry

8 slices multigrain bread

8 ounces dill Havarti, sliced

In a heavy nonstick skillet over medium-low heat, warm the garlic in 1 tablespoon of the olive oil, then add the spinach and cook together for a minute or two until warmed through. On 4 slices of the bread, arrange the cheese, then top with the spinach and a second slice of bread. Press together to seal, then lightly brush the outside of the sandwiches with the remaining olive oil. Brown the sandwiches in the skillet until lightly crisped and golden on one side, then turn over and brown the second side. When the cheese is melted the sandwich is ready. Cut on the diagonal. Serves 4.

Casse Croute of Blue Cheese and Gruyere

1 baguette, split lengthwise and slightly hollowed out
3 tablespoons softened butter
2 tablespoons dry white wine
3 cloves garlic, chopped
10 ounces blue cheese, sliced or crumbled
10 ounces Gruyere or Swiss cheese, thinly sliced
Grating of nutmeg

Preheat the broiler. Spread the baguette halves lightly on the outside with the butter, then sprinkle the inside with some of the wine and some of the garlic. Layer the cheese, ending with a layer of the Gruyere and finishing with a grating of nutmeg, the remaining garlic and a few more drops of the wine. Broil the sandwiches until the cheese melts and sizzles and the edges of bread crisp and brown. Cut into pieces and serve hot. Serves 4 to 6.

Goat Cheese Toasts with Desert Spices

12 thin baguette slices
Extra-virgin olive oil
4 ounces goat cheese
¼ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon thyme
¼ teaspoon paprika
¼ teaspoon ground coriander
2 cloves garlic, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

Preheat broiler. Brush the baguette slices with olive oil, arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet and lightly toast under the broiler on each side. Slice the goat cheese into 1/2-inch slices and cut into pieces to fit the baguette slices. Top the toasted baguette slices with the cheese, then sprinkle with the cumin, thyme, paprika, coriander and chopped garlic. Drizzle with olive oil and broil until the cheese melts slightly and browns in spots. Sprinkle with fresh cilantro and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Grilled Pumpernickel and Gouda with Parsley-Tarragon Mustard

3 tablespoons whole-grain mustard
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley
1 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon
1 small clove garlic, minced
Few drops of red wine vinegar, to taste
8 slices soft dark pumpernickel bread
8 ounces aged Gouda
Softened butter

In a small bowl, combine the mustards, parsley, tarragon and garlic. Add a few drops of vinegar to taste and set aside. Arrange 4 slices of the bread on a work surface. Add a layer of the cheese then top with the second piece of bread. Press together and lightly spread the outsides with butter. Heat a heavy nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Cook sandwiches until crisp on both sides and cheese is melted. Serve immediately with the Parsley-Tarragon mustard on

the side. Serves 4.

Sicilian Sizzled Cheese

5 marinated artichoke hearts, sliced
4 thick slices country bread, either sweet or sourdough
12 ounces provolone, shredded
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon capers in brine, drained
1 teaspoon dried oregano
Several grindings of black pepper
2 teaspoons chopped Italian parsley

Preheat the broiler. Arrange the artichokes on the bread and place on a baking sheet, then top with the cheese. In a heavy, nonstick skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the red wine vinegar, capers, oregano and black pepper, cook for a minute or two, until the liquid reduces to about 2 teaspoons. Stir in the parsley. Spoon over the cheese-topped bread. Broil until cheese melts, bubbles and turns golden in spots. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

French Toast Stuffed with Strawberries and Cream Cheese

8 medium-thick slices sweet white bread (challah or brioche)
8 ounces cream cheese, softened
½ cup strawberry preserves
1 cup sliced strawberries
1 egg yolk
½ cup milk
Dash vanilla extract
Sugar
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
½ cup sour cream
Several sprigs fresh mint, chopped

Spread 4 slices of the bread thickly with the cream cheese, spread the other 4 slices with the preserves. Scatter a light layer of strawberries over the top of the cream cheese, reserving the remaining strawberries for the topping. Top each piece of the cheese-spread bread with a preserve-spread piece of bread. Press to seal. In a shallow bowl, combine the egg yolk, milk, vanilla extract and about 1 tablespoon sugar. Heat a heavy nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the butter. Dip each sandwich, individually, into the bowl with the milk and egg. Let it soak in a moment or two, then turn over and repeat. Place the sandwiches into the hot pan with the melted butter and let them cook to a golden brown. Turn over and brown the second sides. Meanwhile, combine the remaining strawberries with sugar, to taste, and the lemon juice. Serve each sandwich hot with a spoonful of the strawberries and a dollop of the sour cream. Garnish with fresh mint. Serves 4.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's new cookbook, Celebrate Everything! will be released in June 2012.

Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at dbc@cateringbydebbicovington.com.

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