

# A TRIO OF CHEESE BALLS!

**Lemony Cheddar-Olive Ball with Dill and Dijon**

**Herb-Packed Cucumber-Goat Cheese Ball with Seeds and Spices**

**Blue Cheese Ball with Sugared and Salted Black Pepper Almonds**

Makes 3 cheese balls

**REMEMBER, BEST PRACTICE: READ THE RECIPE ALL THE WAY THROUGH BEFORE YOU START COOKING!**

It's super important that your cheeses are completely at room temperature before blending, especially the cream cheese and goat cheese. A good indicator is whether or not you can poke your finger very easily into the cheese. Microwave the cream cheese or goat cheese in bursts of 5 seconds if necessary. (Don't microwave the blue or the cheddar!)

## Lemony Cheddar-Olive Ball with Dill and Dijon

4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

4 ounces aged and/or extra sharp white cheddar, grated on the small holes of a box grater, at room temperature (about 2 cups)

1 heaping tablespoon Dijon mustard

Zest of 1/2 lemon, plus 2 teaspoons lemon juice

1/4 teaspoon cayenne, plus more to taste

1 small garlic clove, grated

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2/3 cup (4 1/2 ounces) Spanish olives with pimentos

1 bunch dill

Crackers, chips, and mixed crudité's, for serving

1. Make the cheese ball: In the bowl of a food processor, combine **4 ounces cream cheese, 4 ounces grated sharp white cheddar, 1 heaping tablespoon Dijon mustard, zest of 1/2 lemon plus 2 teaspoons lemon juice, 1/4 teaspoon cayenne,** and **1 small garlic clove, finely grated.** Season with **salt** and **pepper.** Blend until very smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl as necessary.

2. Add **2/3 cup Spanish olives with pimentos** and pulse just until coarsely chopped. Do not overblend— you want to keep the texture of the olives. Taste. Season with additional **salt** and **cayenne,** if desired. If the mixture doesn't taste punchy and full of flavor, you haven't seasoned aggressively enough. You may even want a bit more lemon juice. Realize that the garlic and lemon zest will intensify as all of the flavors marry and chill, so don't overdo it on those fronts.

3. Scrape the mixture onto a large piece of plastic wrap. (You can unroll two pieces slightly overlapping if you don't have a wide roll.) Gather the edges of the plastic up into the center and twist to enclose and create a ball. Transfer to the refrigerator. Chill until very firm, at least 2 hours or up to 2 days in advance.

4. Finely chop  $\frac{3}{4}$  **cup dill** and place on a work surface. Remove the cheese ball from the refrigerator. While still in its plastic, use your hands to shape it even more so into a ball. (Once chilled it will hold its shape even more easily than when you first formed a ball.) Unwrap and place on top of the dill. Use your hands to roll the ball in the dill to thoroughly cover, pressing and rolling as necessary to help the herbs adhere. Transfer to a serving platter and serve with desired accompaniments, with any remaining herbs from the surface sprinkled on top.

### **Herb-Packed Cucumber-Goat Cheese Ball with Seeds and Spices**

5 ounces English cucumber (about 5-inches or  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a cucumber), unpeeled

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

6 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

6 ounces fresh goat cheese (chèvre), at room temperature

1 cup firmly packed cilantro and parsley leaves, from 1 bunch cilantro and 1 bunch parsley

1 heaping tablespoon finely chopped shallots

$\frac{1}{2}$  jalapeño, sliced, plus more to taste

1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons onion powder

2 teaspoons coriander seeds

2 teaspoons fennel seeds

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup toasted sesame seeds or dukkah\*

Crackers, chips, and mixed crudités, for serving

1. Salt the cucumber: Cut a **5-ounce (about a 5-inch) piece of English cucumber** in half lengthwise. Using a small spoon, scrape out a channel down the center, removing the interior seeds. Discard. Cut the two halves into lengthwise strips. Gather the strips in a bundle and cut crosswise, into a small dice. Transfer the chopped cucumber to a small bowl, sprinkle with **1 teaspoon salt**, and mix to combine. Let sit, stirring from time to time, until watery and juicy, about 10-15 minutes. Transfer cucumbers to a fine-meshed sieve to drain. *Press on the solids to extract as much liquid as possible.*

2. Make the cheese ball: In the bowl of a food processor, combine **6 ounces cream cheese, 6 ounces fresh goat cheese, 1 cup firmly packed cilantro and parsley leaves, 1 heaping tablespoon finely chopped shallots, slices from  $\frac{1}{2}$  jalapeño**, and **1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons onion powder**. Blend until very smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl as necessary. Season generously with **salt** and **pepper** and blend again.

3. Add **drained cucumbers** to the food processor and pulse just once or twice to combine. Do not overprocess!! Doing so will make the mixture too loose and will be less firm once chilled. (It'll make a great dip, though!)

4. Scrape the mixture onto a large piece of plastic wrap. (You can use two slightly overlapping pieces if you don't have a wide roll.) Gather the edges of the plastic up into the center and twist to enclose to create a ball. Transfer to the refrigerator. If the mixture does seem a bit loose, you can place the ball into a small bowl to encourage a round shape. Chill until very firm, at least 3 hours or up to 2 days in advance.

5. While the cheese ball chills, make the coating: Toast **2 teaspoons coriander seeds** and **2 teaspoons fennel seeds** in a small skillet over medium heat until fragrant and lightly toasted, about 2-3 minutes. Transfer to a mortar and pestle and crush until coarsely ground. Combine with  **$\frac{1}{2}$  cup toasted sesame seeds** in a small bowl and

season generously with salt and pepper. (Alternatively, use dukkah\*, or follow the instructions in the asterisk to make your own.)

6. Place half of the seed mixture (or dukkah, if using) on a work surface. Remove the cheese ball from the refrigerator. While still in its plastic, use your hands to shape it even more so into a ball. (Once chilled it will hold its shape even more easily than when you first formed a ball.) Unwrap directly onto the seeds. Sprinkle the remaining seeds on top. Use your hands to roll the ball in the seeds to thoroughly cover, pressing and rolling as necessary to help adhere. (Using a bench scraper here can be very helpful to turn the ball and get it coated.)

Transfer to a serving platter and serve with desired accompaniments, with any remaining seeds from the surface sprinkled on top.

\*Surprisingly, Trader Joe's makes a pretty good dukkah! But you can make a quickie dukkah-adjacent mixture by combining sesame seeds, coriander seeds, cumin seeds and fennel seeds in a skillet and toasting until fragrant. (Use 4 parts sesame seeds to 1 part of the other seeds.) Transfer to a mortar and pestle, along with 2 parts toasted hazelnuts or almonds and pound until coarsely ground. Season generously with salt and pepper (and sumac, if you have it).

### **Blue Cheese Ball with Sugared and Salted Black Pepper Almonds**

8 ounces blue cheese, such as Stilton, Roquefort, or Danish blue, at room temperature

4 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

1 tablespoon lightly packed thyme leaves

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 1/2 ounces (1 cup) sliced almonds

Vegetable oil or cooking spray, for greasing parchment

1 tablespoon brown sugar

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

2 tablespoons water

Crackers, chips, and mixed crudités, for serving

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment.

2. Make the cheese ball: In the bowl of a food processor, combine **8 ounces blue cheese**, **4 ounces cream cheese**, and **1 tablespoon packed thyme leaves**. Blend until very smooth, scraping down the sides of the bowl as necessary. Season with **salt** and **pepper** and blend again.

3. Scrape the mixture onto a large piece of plastic wrap. (You can use two slightly overlapping pieces if you don't have a wide roll.) Gather the edges of the plastic up into the center and twist to enclose to create a ball. Transfer to the refrigerator. If the mixture seems a bit loose, you can place the ball into a small bowl to encourage a round shape. Chill until very firm, at least 3 hours or up to 2 days in advance.

4. While the cheese ball chills, make the Sugared and Salted Black Pepper Almonds: Place **3 1/2 ounces sliced almonds** on prepared baking sheet. Transfer to the oven and toast until deeply golden, stirring once halfway

through, about 8-12 minutes. Transfer nuts to a medium bowl and lightly grease the parchment **vegetable oil** or **nonstick cooking spray**. Add **1 tablespoon brown sugar** and toss to combine.

5. In a small saucepan, combine **3 tablespoons granulated sugar** and **2 tablespoons water**. Bring to a boil over high heat, stirring, until sugar is dissolved. Scrape sugar syrup into the bowl with the almonds. Toss to thoroughly coat. Season generously with **salt** and very generously with **black pepper**. Transfer to the greased parchment-lined baking sheet and spread with a spatula in an even layer. Bake, stirring twice, until the nuts look nearly dry, about 10-15 minutes. Use your timer! The nuts can burn in a matter of minutes, so watch that clock!

6. Transfer the nuts to a work surface and chop somewhat finely, with some larger pieces still remaining. (NOTE: Remove nuts from baking sheet while still somewhat warm to prevent sticking.)

7. Remove the cheese ball from the refrigerator. While still in its plastic, use your hands to shape it even more so into a ball. (Once chilled it will hold its shape even more easily than when you first formed a ball.) Unwrap directly onto the nuts. Use your hands to roll the ball to thoroughly cover, pressing and rolling as necessary to help adhere. (Using a bench scraper here can be very helpful to turn the ball and get it coated.)

8. Transfer to a serving platter and serve with desired accompaniments, with any remaining nuts from the surface sprinkled on top.

# NOODLE