

# Around the Fondue Pot

Winter 2007/volume 24

## Thursday Night Cooking Parties

### February

- 8 Romantic Dinners
- 22 Paris Bistro

### March

- 1 French Country Cooking
- 15 Moroccan Nights
- 29 Tuscan Feast

### April

- 12 Grazing on Tapas
- 26 More Paris Bistro

### May

- 10 Another Tuscan Feast
- 24 More French Country Cooking

### June

- 7 Summer Salads

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One of the first things I learned when I moved to Switzerland was that the Swiss take their fondue very seriously. In the US fondue comes in and out of style. Fondue was very hot in the '70's when fondue pots were a popular wedding gift and every new couple received 1 or 3 or more. For a few years bubbling pots of cheese or chocolate were staples at parties. And then, as with most fads, fondue faded away, replaced by Tex-Mex, Thai and other treats. Last year the foodie press declared a fondue renaissance; fondue was back.

In Switzerland fondue is not a fad that comes and goes every 30 or so years. Cheese fondue was invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by cow-herders not to be fun and trendy but out of necessity. During the cold winter months fresh food was scarce in Alpine villages and farmers had to think creatively or starve. Melting cheese over a flame for a communal meal warmed the body inside and out.



Fondue is a simple meal; start with a ceramic pot and a hint of garlic, heat up some dry white wine throw in a few handfuls of cheese and finish with a splash of kirsch. Most Americans are familiar with Fondue Neuchâteloise, which combines gruyère and emmental cheeses. My favorite is Moitié-Moitié or half-half with gruyère and Fribourg vacherin. Crusty country bread is speared by long forks and twirled in the hot, creamy cheese. From time to time a piece of bread falls off the fork and into fondue. Tradition dictates that he who loses his bread buys the next bottle of wine and she who loses her bread offers a kiss to each of the men at the table.

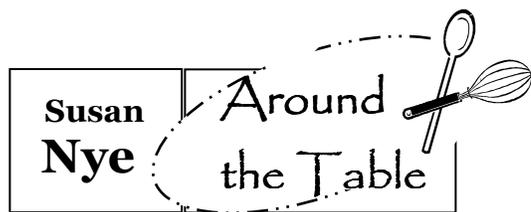
As you would expect in a country where "everything which is not forbidden, is required," certain rules apply when eating fondue.

1. Never eat fondue in the summer. Relaxing around a pot of piping hot cheese is a lovely way to spend a winter evening, but steamy business in the middle of summer. Every year the Swiss celebrate the first cold, rainy days of autumn with a fondue.
2. Only drink white wine, preferably Fendant from the Valais region of Switzerland. For children or anyone who does not drink wine, hot tea is ok, but never beer, water, juice or heaven forbid coca-cola. The practical explanation or urban myth for this rule is that these drinks will cause the cheese to come together into a hard, cold ball in the pit of your stomach. Every Swiss person knows someone who knows someone who knows someone whose uncle died from drinking a cold beer after a fondue.
3. Dessert is not required, but if you do indulge, fruit cocktail with a splash of kirsch is the traditional after-fondue sweet. Ice cream is strictly frowned on; see rule number 2.

Americans are notorious for breaking these rules. Walk past any café that serves fondue during July and you are sure to find a few tourists enjoying a fondue in the hot sunshine; and yes, washing it down with a beer or a Coke.

My favorite time to eat fondue is after skiing. Exercise in the cold sunshine is the perfect prelude to a fondue party. Relaxing around a pot of bubbling hot cheese with a group of friends and a bottle of Fendant is a great way to spend a lazy evening after a long day on the slopes.

Bon appétit! - Susan



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### Traditional Cheese Fondue

You should have no trouble finding gruyère and emmental cheeses. If you can track down some Fribourg vacherin, try Moitié-Moitié. A combination of gruyère, tilsit and appenzell is also wonderful if you can find them.

Serves 6

1 clove garlic, halved  
1¼ cup dry white wine  
2½ pounds cheese  
    Try ½ gruyère and ½ emmental  
    Or ½ gruyère and ½ Fribourg vacherin  
    Or ½ gruyère, ¼ tilsit and ¼ appenzell  
1 tablespoon corn starch  
1 ounce Kirsch  
Freshly ground pepper  
Crusty country bread cut or torn into bite sized pieces

Special equipment: a caquelon or fondue pot, stand for the pot, alcohol burner and long handled fondue forks.

1. Grate the cheeses and toss to combine.
2. Mix the corn starch with the Kirsch.
3. Rub the fondue pot with the garlic. Drop both clove halves in the bottom of the pot. Put the wine in the pot; bring the wine to a simmer over medium heat. Add the cheese. Stir constantly until the cheese is melted and bubbling. Add the kirsch/corn starch mixture and stir to combine. Sprinkle with freshly ground pepper.
4. Set the fondue pot on its stand over a low flame. Pierce a piece of bread with a fondue fork and swirl it through the cheese. Enjoy!