



Comté Tasting Guide

Like wine, each wheel of Comté has unique aromas and flavors, which are influenced by the pastures of origin, the season of production, the time spent aging, and the unique style of the affineur, or cellar master. Whether hosting a cheese tasting party, training store staff, cooking with Comté, conducting store demos, or simply enjoying it at home alone, follow this tasting guide to help you best discover—and enjoy—the innumerable characteristics of Comté.

| COMTÉ TASTING GUIDE | | | |
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| | Explanation | Questions | Notes |
| 1. Appearance: Rind | <i>First, observe the rind, which tells the story of the wheel's fabrication. Its grainy surface is evidence of the Comté mold that was used to shape the cheese, and the color—ranging from beige to light brown—depends on the atmosphere of the cellar where it was aged.</i> | What does the rind look like? Light or dark? Smooth or rough? Thin or Thick? | |
| 2. Appearance: Cheese Body (Paste) | <i>Next, observe the cheese body, or paste. Made without colorants or additives, Comté's color reflects the season in which it was made. The body of "summer" Comté, made from the milk of cows grazing on fresh plants rich in carotene, will have a yellow tint. A "winter" Comté, made from milk of cows fed on dried hay, will be paler ivory in color. The body can also reflect the age; an older Comté is likely to display tiny crystals, resulting from the build-up of the amino acid tyrosine during aging. The body may also have openings, or small holes ("eyes") that form during maturation from moderate propionic fermentation, which releases carbon dioxide. A wheel with no eyes is said to be "massif" (solid).</i> | What is the color of the cheese body? Are there any small crystals visible? Does the cheese have openings, or is it solid? | |
| 3. Smell | <i>To perceive the most volatile aromas, break a piece of Comté between your fingers and sniff it immediately. Comté aromas are classified into 6 groups: Lactic (milk and milk products), Fruity (fresh or dry fruit, fresh nuts, honey), Roasted (toasted bread, roasted nuts, coffee), Vegetable (green plants, vegetables, mushrooms), Animal (meat stock, leather, egg) and Spicy (vanilla, nutmeg, pepper, mint). The Comté Wheel of Aromas identifies 83 common terms that are used to describe the different aromas in tasting. (The Wheel of Aromas can be downloaded at www.comte-usa.com)</i> | Is the smell weak or intense? How would you describe the smell? What are 3 different specific aromas that you detect? | |

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| 4. Taste: Texture | <p><i>Put the piece of Comté in your mouth and chew slowly. Concentrate on the texture of the cheese. Comté's texture can be broken down into the following characteristics:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>-Elasticity: the ability to return to its original shape, assessed by lightly pressing on the cheese (elastic → no elasticity)</i> <i>-Firmness: resistance to deformation (firm → has body → soft)</i> <i>-Unctuousness: feeling of creaminess (dry → unctuous/creamy)</i> <i>-Microstructure: size and number of particles perceived after chewing; as the cheese matures its texture becomes less grainy and increasingly smooth (grainy → floury → fine → smooth)</i> | What consistency does the cheese have? Is it elastic, firm, creamy? How does it develop? Does it become grainy or does it produce very fine particles? | |
| 5. Taste: Flavors | <p><i>Now concentrate on the flavors of the cheese:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>-Salty: created mainly by the salt that was rubbed on the cheese to produce the rind.</i> <i>-Sugary: can be quite marked in certain cheeses due to propionic fermentation and proteolysis, or the breakdown of proteins.</i> <i>-Acidic: not very intense; younger Comté tends to have more acidity than older Comté.</i> <i>-Bitter: sometimes detected in the aftertaste; unpleasant if too marked, but positive if balanced.</i> | What flavors (salty, sugary, acidic, bitter) do you perceive? | |
| 6. Taste: Aromas | <p><i>By breathing as you taste, Comté's aromas rise naturally to your nose. Let the air held in your mouth out slowly through your nose and concentrate on the cheese's aromas. Intense aromas aren't necessarily the ideal; rather, the aromas should be diverse and in harmony. This diversity can articulate itself through time, as aromas don't express themselves simultaneously. Persistence refers to the aromas that linger after swallowing. Certain cheeses have more persistence than others.</i></p> | Are the aromas discreet or powerful? Do you recognize the dominant groups and some specific aromas in particular? Are the aromas persistent: do you continue to perceive them after swallowing? | |

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