



If these yummy-looking sandwich photos have caught your fancy and you're thinking that you might be feeling kind of cheesy, before you even start to read this column, take a stick of salted butter out of the refrigerator so it can come to room temperature. Go ahead and do it. If you don't, when your stomach starts growling and you have to wait, you'll wish you had. I'll explain why later.

Recently, I was at the salon with my beloved hair guru, Michael Petorock, and we were talking about one of our favorite restaurants (which shall remain nameless) in the North Carolina mountains. I was telling Michael that when Vince and I lunched there last August, I had ordered a simple grilled cheese sandwich and was served the most wretched sandwich ever. EVER. Seriously. I mean it was really bad. Two slices of dry toast with a miniscule amount of semi-melted cheese on the inside. Completely disappointing. Michael's response was something like, "why would you order a grilled cheese sandwich in a gourmet restaurant?" I mean, I figured since it was a fine dining establishment, and since grilled cheese was on the menu, that the sandwich would be at least as good as mine – or even better. No such luck.

The truth is, you don't have to be a chef to make an amazing grilled cheese sandwich. You just have to know the three secrets. First of all, you have to use room temperature butter. Soft butter makes all the difference. Some chefs use melted butter. I just don't think it gives the same result. You want the butter to flavor and toast the outside of the bread making the sandwich rich and crispy. You don't want bread that's been soaked in butter. Plan ahead and give the butter time to soften. You'll be glad you did, it's totally worth the wait. Secondly, a good-quality white bread is a must. Don't ruin a perfectly good sandwich that's loaded with cheese and slathered in butter thinking you can make it semi-healthy by using whole wheat bread. Just don't do it.

Thirdly, and most importantly, you need to understand that there's an art to making a grilled cheese sandwich. It has to be cooked on low heat, low and slow, in order to evenly toast the bread as well as melt the cheese inside. Never cook a grilled cheese sandwich on anything higher than medium heat or you'll end up with over-toasted bread and unmelted cheese.

These are some of my favorite grilled cheese sandwich combinations. Be sure to use top quality ingredients. Grilled cheese is not something you get to eat everyday. Or, at least not something you should eat everyday. Make it count. P.S. I use a non-stick skillet.

Grilled Cheddar, Bacon and Tomato Sandwich

I prefer extra-sharp cheddar cheese in almost everything I make. Mild, medium or sharp are also delicious. A ripe tomato is a must!



2 slices hearty white or sourdough bread
2 tablespoons salted butter, divided
2 slices extra-sharp cheddar cheese
3 slices bacon, cooked
2 slices ripe tomato

Preheat skillet over medium heat. Generously butter one side of a slice of bread. Place bread, butter side down, onto skillet. Add 2 slices cheese, bacon and tomato slices. Butter a second slice of bread and place, butter side up, on top of sandwich. Grill until bottom side of sandwich

is lightly browned. Flip sandwich over and continue grilling until lightly browned and cheese is melted. Serves 1.

Grilled Roast Beef, Gruyere and Bleu Cheese Sandwich

Use the best quality of beef that you can find – none of that deli stuff. Leftover pot roast or steak would be delicious!



- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon prepared horseradish
- 2 slices hearty white or sourdough bread
- 2 tablespoons salted butter, divided
- 2 slices gruyere or Swiss cheese
- Roast beef, thinly sliced
- ¼ cup bleu cheese crumbles

In a very small bowl, combine mayonnaise with prepared horseradish; set aside. Preheat skillet over medium heat. Generously butter one side of a slice of bread. Place bread, butter side down, onto skillet. Add 2 slices gruyere cheese, sliced roast beef and bleu cheese crumbles. Spread mayonnaise mixture on one side of the second slice of bread and place it face down on top of sandwich. Butter the other side of the bread. Grill until bottom side of sandwich is lightly browned. Flip sandwich over and continue grilling until lightly browned and cheese is melted. Serves 1.

Grilled Goat Cheese, Pesto and Tomato Sandwich

(see picture at top of page)

If you make your own pesto, use it! If not, prepared pesto will work just as well.

2 slices hearty white or sourdough bread

2 tablespoons salted butter, divided

¼ cup goat cheese, softened

2 tablespoons basil pesto

2 slices ripe tomato

Preheat skillet over medium heat. Generously butter one side of a slice of bread. Place bread, butter side down, onto skillet. Add goat cheese, pesto and tomato slices. Butter a second slice of bread and place, butter side up, on top of sandwich. Grill until bottom side of sandwich is lightly browned. Flip sandwich over and continue grilling until lightly browned and cheese is melted. Serves 1.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of two cookbooks, 2013 Gold Medal Winner of the Benjamin Franklin Award, Celebrate Everything! and Dining Under the



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