

Pimento Cheese

Time: 45 minutes hands-on time

If you, like many Southerners, adore pimento cheese—even bad pimento cheese—here's one way to make it: Head over to the Food Lion, pick up a bag of shredded cheddar, a jar of pimentos, and a squeeze-bottle of Miracle Whip. Mix them together in a bowl and spread on slices of Wonder Bread. Boom.

Or, you can settle down and make this absolutely ethereal pimento cheese, with brilliant roasted red pepper flavor set up against the smooth bite of aged cheddar. It's a spread that will grab your attention—like a Roman candle going off in your mouth. It's not difficult or particularly time consuming to make. And we're not even suggesting that homemade mayonnaise enter this equation. Why? Because pimento cheese isn't celery rémoulade, that's why.

But it does need great cheese. We made the best pimento cheese with aged raw-milk cheddar. Problem is, aged raw-milk cheddar is white; pimento cheese is yellow. So taste and tradition had to wrestle out a compromise: Half sharp yellow cheddar and half aged raw-milk cheddar create pimento cheese with the expected color and a flavor that is absolutely off the charts. If you cannot find aged raw-milk cheddar, buy the best sharp yellow cheddar you can get your hands on and use it full strength.

(To be truthful, great pimento cheese tastes really good spread on slices of grilled Wonder Bread.)

Equipment Mise en Place

For roasting the peppers you will need a pair of tongs and one of the following: an outdoor or indoor grill, an old cooling rack that you can set over a gas burner, a stovetop grill (photo 1), or, if you're going to use a broiler, a sheet pan or broiler pan. For peeling and dicing the peppers, you will need a plastic grocery shopping bag and a sharp paring knife. For the rest of the recipe you will need a chef's knife, a small nonreactive bowl, a box grater, a large bowl, and a rubber spatula.

Ingredients

3 firm red bell peppers (6 ounces each), roasted, peeled, and cut into 1/8-inch dice (see Cooking Remarks)

4 garlic cloves

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

Fine sea salt

Hot sauce, such as Tabasco

Cooking Remarks

The practical reason for roasting a pepper is to loosen its skin so you can peel it. The poetic reason for roasting a pepper is to lift it to another dimension, where it becomes silky, smoky, soft, sweet, and magical. We like the second reason best. [Click here for instructions on roasting peppers.](#)

We ask that you store the roasted peppers and their juices in a nonreactive bowl. Nonreactive cookware is cookware that doesn't react with acids or brines; these reactions can give foods an unwanted "off" or metallic flavor. The juices from the roasted peppers can react in this way. Aluminum and cast iron are the most common reactive materials used in cookware. Stick with stainless steel, glass, or ceramic and you'll be fine. (Nonstick cookware is also fine as long as the coating is intact.)

12 ounces cheddar cheese, preferably 6 ounces each of sharp yellow cheddar and aged raw-milk cheddar (if the latter is unavailable, use 12 ounces of sharp yellow cheddar)

1/2 cup (4 ounces) Hellman's or Best Foods mayonnaise, plus more as needed

Crackers or celery ribs for serving

Directions

1. Add the diced peppers and any residual juice to a small nonreactive bowl (you should have 1 very generous cup). Smash the garlic cloves with the flat side of a chef's knife, remove and discard the skins, and add the garlic to the bowl with the peppers. Stir in the vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and up to 1/2 teaspoon hot sauce. Cover with plastic wrap and let stand for 1 to 2 hours.
2. Meanwhile, grate the cheeses on the large holes of a box grater (you should have about 4 cups lightly packed). Turn the cheeses into a large bowl and set aside.
3. Remove and discard the garlic cloves from the peppers, which are now pimentos, and, using a rubber spatula, stir the pimentos into the grated cheese until well combined. Add the mayonnaise and fold lightly with the spatula. If the mixture appears too dry, fold in additional mayonnaise, 1 tablespoon at a time. Taste for seasoning.
4. Transfer the pimento cheese to a serving container with a lid, cover tightly, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Serve chilled with crackers or packed into celery ribs. (Covered tightly, pimento cheese keeps refrigerated for up to 1 week.)

Makes 3 cups