

Pistachio-Date Cheese Ball

Yield 1 large cheese ball / **Prep time** 15 minutes

8 ounces room-temperature cream cheese
2 ounces coarsely grated sharp cheddar (heaping $\frac{1}{2}$ cup)
2 ounces crumbled bleu cheese (heaping $\frac{1}{4}$ cup)
4 medium dates, pitted and diced
1 small shallot, finely minced
1 clove garlic, finely grated or minced
Pinch cayenne pepper or a few dashes hot sauce
A few swipes of lemon zest
About $\frac{1}{2}$ cup coarsely chopped toasted pistachios or pecans

Picking through the cheese “ends” at a cheese counter — the smaller leftover pieces that are too small to sell from behind the counter — is a great place to source the cheddar and bleu cheeses here. It’s the pungent cheese that gives so much character to this.

Make sure to use toasted or roasted nuts, so that you get a toasty contrast in the coating.

This is inspired by the “Fantastic Cheese Ball” from [Bound to Please: The Irresistible Idaho Cookbook](#).

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1. In a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, or a mixing bowl if using a hand mixer, blend the cheeses, dates, shallot, garlic, cayenne, and lemon until combined. You can also mix it all by hand as long as the cream cheese is softened.

2. Spread the chopped nuts out on a plate or small baking sheet. Scrape the cheese mixture out of the bowl and use your hands to shape it into a ball by slapping it back and forth and compressing it. Roll it through the chopped nuts until well coated all around. Place it covered, or in an airtight container, in the refrigerator for a few hours or ideally overnight, during which time the flavors will develop.

3. Allow to soften at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes, then serve as an appetizer with crackers and crudités. The cheese ball will keep well for several days, stored in the fridge.