

the word on cheese

# culture



(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP)

*Ricotta Ginepro*

MARCELLI FORMAGGI

*Ricotta Peperoncino*

MARCELLI FORMAGGI

*Ricotta Scorza Nera*

GREGORIO ROTOLO

## *Ricotta in Reserve*


—Kate Arding

IN YEARS PAST, shepherds in the mountains or remote areas of Italy who couldn't get their fresh ricotta to market quickly would often salt it heavily to preserve it. This ricotta salata (salted ricotta), sometimes called ricotta stagionata (aged ricotta), would last for months, becoming firm enough to slice or, eventually, to grate. Some shepherds would suspend the salted ricotta on shelves above the wood-fired vat they used for heating milk; within a few days, the cheese would be caramel colored on the outside and infused with smoke, another preservative.

Modern Italian cheesemakers have co-opted this tradition, maturing ricotta not out of necessity but for the appealing flavor and texture produced. In Abruzzo, cheesemaker Gregorio Rotolo makes Ricotta Scorza Nera, a salted version matured for a hundred days. During this aging, the ricotta grows a thin black film on the outside, hence its name. This dark

skin, created by molds, protects the dense cheese inside so it can mature into a supremely delicate aged ricotta. Marcelli also produces a firm yet creamy Ricotta Ginepro, cheese smoked with juniper wood. Both are made with organic raw sheep's whey from the rare Sopravvissana sheep, which yields only one-fifth the milking volume of other common dairy breeds.

Casa Madaio, in the Campania region of Italy, is also aging ricotta to create a product all its own. Using water buffalo whey, the cheesemaker drains the ricotta for eight days, covers it with table salt, and matures the cheese in a cellar for at least 40 days, turning it regularly to allow for even drying. The finished cheese, Barilotto, is delicately milky and sweet without the intense saltiness of a traditional ricotta salata. Just before going to market, the top of the cheese is branded with a hot stamp leaving a symbolic imprint of the castle tower at Casa Madaio.



# Remains of the Whey

*Ricotta used to be a cheese  
made from leftovers—now  
it's dairy deluxe*



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# fresh & domestic

—Product reviews by **culture**

## **ALLEVA RICOTTA**

From whole cow's milk acidified with high-acid whey; hand-packed in a tin with drainage holes. No salt is added, so the flavor is sweet and milky but quite plain.

[allevadairy.com](http://allevadairy.com)

## **BELGIOIOSO WHOLE MILK RICOTTA**

This high-moisture ricotta made from whey and cow's milk has a creamy, spreadable texture with no obvious curds. The flavors are sweet and milky, the finish clean, and the salt appropriate.

[belgioioso.com](http://belgioioso.com)

## **BELLWETHER FARMS SHEEP'S MILK WHEY RICOTTA**

From sheep's milk whey and sheep's milk acidified with vinegar; hand-packed in three-and-a-half-pound baskets or tubs. Snow white, moist, and barely sliceable, this ricotta has the tender texture of soft tofu. Salt quotient is perfect. Sweet and

fresh, with an intriguing animal quality typical of sheep's milk.

[bellwetherfarms.com](http://bellwetherfarms.com)

## **BELLWETHER FARMS WHOLE COW'S MILK RICOTTA**

A cultured whole cow's milk ricotta hand-packed in a square drainage basket; it's pale butter in color with a soft, quivery—though sliceable—texture. The taste and aroma are reminiscent of crème fraîche, with a buttery richness. Salt is ample but not overpowering.

[bellwetherfarms.com](http://bellwetherfarms.com)

## **CALABRO HAND-DIPPED RICOTTA**

Made according to a 100-year-old method, this artisan ricotta has a buttery sweetness and a creamy, fluffy texture with lingering fresh milky flavors. Hand-dipped and hand-packed into perforated metal cones for ideal drainage, Calabro considers this ricotta the pride of its cheese line.

[calabrocheese.com](http://calabrocheese.com)

## **COACH FARM GOAT MILK RICOTTA**

A “deli-style” ricotta made from goat's whey, meant for use as an ingredient rather than as a stand-alone cheese. Spoonable and pasty, its texture is slightly pebbly. Flavor is salty at first, giving way to that of cooked milk and a hint of goat's milk.

[coachfarmstore.com](http://coachfarmstore.com)

## **HARLEY FARMS GOAT'S MILK RICOTTA**

Hand-ladled into one-pound draining baskets, this farmstead goat's milk ricotta has a dense, chewy texture and bright white appearance. Its flavor and saltiness are subtle, with the taste of fresh milk and cooked protein coming to the fore.

[harleyfarms.com](http://harleyfarms.com)

## **NARRAGANSETT CREAMERY RENAISSANCE RICOTTA**

From whole cow's milk acidified with vinegar, this kettle-heated ricotta is lightly salted, moist,

and delicate on the tongue. Hand-packed in a tin with drainage holes, it stays sweet and fresh for days.

[richeeses.com](http://richeeses.com)

## **OLD CHATHAM SHEPHERDING COMPANY RICOTTA**

Made from sheep's milk whey and packed in tubs, it has a pebbly, chewy texture and an ivory hue. Salt is a prominent flavor yet doesn't detract from a sweet, milky finish. This is a workhorse ricotta, best for cooking and baking.

[blacksheepcheese.com](http://blacksheepcheese.com)

## **SALVATORE BKLYN RICOTTA**

Made from whole cow's milk acidified with lemon juice and hand-packed in eight-ounce tubs, this brand is smooth and spreadable—closer in texture to cream cheese than classic ricotta—and has a pronounced lemon flavor.

[salvatorebklyn.com](http://salvatorebklyn.com)

# aged & imported

## **CASA MADAIO BARILOTTO**

A buffalo whey ricotta matured for at least 40 days, it has an exceptional umami-like richness that coats the mouth, balanced by a tangy, lemonlike brininess. The texture is flawlessly smooth and white, like fine paper.

[casamadaio.com](http://casamadaio.com)

## **MARCELLI FORMAGGI RICOTTA GINEPRO**

Made from raw sheep's whey, this superb ten-ounce disk is cured for two months. Smoked over juniper wood, it's exceptionally moist and creamy for

aged ricotta yet sliceable; salt and smoke are prominent but not aggressive.

[marcelliformaggi.com](http://marcelliformaggi.com)

## **MARCELLI FORMAGGI RICOTTA PEPERONCINO**

A cold-smoked sheep's whey ricotta coated with Abruzzo chili peppers and aged for three to six months. The texture is silky smooth and dense, but not dry. Flavors are spicy and sweet with a mild smoky finish.

[marcelliformaggi.com](http://marcelliformaggi.com)

## **GREGORIO ROTOLO RICOTTA SCORZA NERA**

Made from organic raw sheep's milk whey and aged for a hundred days. Flavors are creamy and spicy with a pronounced tang offset by the natural sweetness of the sheep's milk; semisoft texture is extremely smooth and fine.

[marcelliformaggi.com](http://marcelliformaggi.com)

## **PIETRA DEL SALE RICOTTA STAGIONATA**

From goat's and sheep's whey, this aged ricotta is dense and delightfully creamy with light salting. Firm enough to shave, it makes an excellent table cheese.

[pietradelsale.it](http://pietradelsale.it)

