



RICOTTA CHEESE

**Ingredient
of the Month**



Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation

Although ricotta is part of the soft-cheese category, it is technically a dairy product. Ricotta is made from whey, a byproduct of making cheese. The leftover hot milk whey contains milk solids and a protein called albumin that solidifies under high heat. When the whey is reheated to near-boiling temperatures, the solid protein pieces, or curds, rise to the surface. These curds are skimmed, strained and placed in perforated containers to further drain. The result is fresh ricotta cheese that is creamy and slightly grainy, with a mild flavor and a hint of sweetness.

It is believed that ricotta was developed to use the large amounts of whey produced by Italy's cheesemaking industry. Italian ricottas typically come from sheep's milk, but can also be made from cow's, goat's or Italian water buffalo's milk.

American ricottas are commonly made with a combination of whey and whole or skim milk, which produces a wetter, creamier ricotta than Italian versions.

Used in both sweet and savory dishes, ricotta cheese is high in health-promoting vitamins and minerals. It is rich in the minerals calcium and phosphorus to support bone health. Ricotta cheese is an excellent source of selenium, a mineral that helps regulate inflammation. It provides the body with vitamin A for healthy eyes and zinc for a healthy immune system. Ricotta cheese is moderately high in saturated fat and cholesterol and should be enjoyed in moderation. It can be combined with foods that are high in fiber to counter the high cholesterol. Too much cholesterol in a diet can clog arteries and increase the risk of coronary problems.

Healthy Ingredient Contribution

Values from NutritionData.com based on cheese, ricotta, whole milk, 1 cup (246 grams).

CALCIUM: Ricotta contains 51 percent of the daily recommended value of calcium, a mineral that is important for strong bones and preventing osteoporosis. It plays a major role in cellular processes involving neurotransmitter release and muscle contraction.

SELENIUM: One serving of ricotta provides 51 percent of the daily recommended value of selenium, a trace mineral that helps regulate inflammation. It works as an antioxidant to protect cells from damage.

PHOSPHORUS: Ricotta supplies 39 percent of the daily recommended value of phosphorus, a mineral needed primarily in forming healthy bones. It plays a role in how the body stores and uses energy and helps reduce muscle pain.

RIBOFLAVIN: One serving of ricotta contains 28 percent of the daily recommended value of riboflavin, an essential vitamin that is important in the body for energy metabolism of carbohydrates, fat and protein. It helps protect the body from free radicals.

VITAMIN A: Ricotta provides 22 percent of the daily recommended value of vitamin A, which is essential for healthy eyes and teeth. The antioxidant properties of vitamin A also combat free radicals that can damage the skin.

ZINC: One serving of ricotta supplies 19 percent of zinc, a mineral that is important for a healthy immune system, energy metabolism and healing wounds. It helps keep brain function strong for improved memory.

Types and Varieties

RICOTTA ROMANA, or ricotta gentile, is a fresh ricotta cheese made with sheep's milk whey left over from making Pecorino Romano. It has a fine texture with a particularly sweet milk-flavored taste.

RICOTTA DI BUFOLA is a fresh ricotta cheese made with whey collected while processing water buffalo's milk. It has a firm texture with a delicate, sweet flavor.

RICOTTA SALATA is ricotta cheese that is made from sheep's milk whey and has been pressed, salted and aged for at least 90 days. It is milky-white in color with a firm texture and salty taste.

RICOTTA INFORNATA, or ricotta al forno, is made by placing fresh ricotta cheese in the oven until it develops a light-brown crust. It has a soft/crumby texture with a mild, toasty flavor.

RICOTTA AFFUMICATA is made by placing fresh ricotta cheese in a smoker until it develops a grey crust. It has a soft/crumby texture with a pleasant smoky flavor.

RICOTTA FORTE, or ricotta scanta, is a spreadable ricotta cheese made by fermenting fresh ricotta cheese. It has a cream cheese-like texture with a distinct sharp and tangy flavor.

Selecting and Storing

- Good ricotta cheese should be firm, not solid, with fine, moist grains.
- Stored properly in a closed container in the refrigerator, ricotta cheese lasts for 5-7 days past the printed "sell by" date.
- Spoiled ricotta cheese will have a damp smell and will develop a yellowish color. There will be pockets of water in the container and it will begin to taste sour.

Culinary Uses

- Blend with lemon juice for a refreshing snack. Make a creamy parfait by blending yogurt and ricotta cheese and adding fruit and granola.
- Use ricotta cheese to make a tasty cheesecake. Create a delicious dessert by combining ricotta cheese with sugar, cinnamon, strawberries and chocolate shavings.
- Mix with Italian herbs for a healthy dip or pasta stuffing. Add to casseroles and sauces for a rich creaminess. Substitute for mayonnaise in egg or tuna salad.
- Use part-skim or fat-free varieties of ricotta cheese.

Interesting Facts

- The name "ricotta" comes from the Latin word "recocter," which means "re-cooked" or "twice cooked."
- Ricotta cheese is not a cheese, but a dairy product.
- Eating ricotta cheese helps the environment by using whey, a byproduct created when making cheese. Before ricotta was developed, whey would foul up sewers and rivers, killing fish, because it is not degradable.
- The production of ricotta dates back to the Bronze Age on the Italian peninsula.



American Culinary Federation
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