



A Cheese Chat with the “Bonne Femme,” Wini Moranville

Wini Moranville is the author of *The Bonne Femme Cookbook: Simple, Splendid Food That French Women Cook Every Day*. She also writes a monthly wine column for *Relish* magazine and contributes to a variety of publications within the *Better Homes and Gardens* family of publications.

As you write in your book, you’ve been a Francophile for years. Do you remember the first time you tried Comté?

While I’m sure I enjoyed Comté in France many times when I was younger, I wasn’t aware of it by name until the summer of 2003. There was a killer heat wave in France that summer. My husband and I were staying in the Côte d’Azur in the south, and decided to head to the north, thinking it would be cooler (it wasn’t!). On our way to Alsace and Champagne, we stopped for a few days in the Jura, and I fell in love with the unspoiled region! It was there I first remember eating Comté, which was served to me with the region’s famous Vin Jaune as a little appetizer/apéritif pairing before dinner. It was love at first bite!

That’s a pairing that goes back centuries! Do you have any other favorite dishes from the Jura?

I will never forget the first time I had fondue made completely with Comté. It was in the Jura. Until then, I could never see what the fuss was about when it came to fondue. But when I tasted it with Comté, it was a revelation! Now, every time I make Comté fondue, it takes me back to that mountainside—buzzing and chirping and alive with sweet grass smells.

Back home in Iowa, was Comté hard to find?

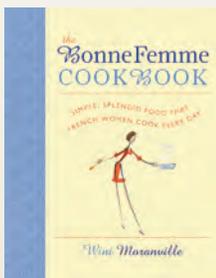
It was very hard to find here in *Amerique profonde* until about three years ago. I used to buy it on trips elsewhere in the country and bring it home. Now, we have some incredibly passionate, committed cheese-sellers—who always have a giant *meule* of it. And we can also get it at Trader Joe’s, so we’re flush with this cheese. Thank heavens!

Sounds like you’re stocked!

I always have a major-size wedge of Comté on hand. I use it as often in my cooking as an Italian cook uses Parmigiano-Reggiano. I just love the depth of flavor and the complexity it brings to cooking—and you don’t have to use a ton of it to get those effects.

What are some ways that you use it?

I’m a huge fan of the cheese course, so Comté is always served in the mix of cheese I offer after the main course. I also use it in pasta (my French lasagna, made with Comté and a béchamel sauce, is divine). A little goes a long way in salads, too (Comté-Walnut salad with butterhead lettuce is a great sit-down starter). I was also impressed with the way chefs in the Jura combined Comté and curry. I do that in my Chicken, Comté, and Spinach Salad with Apples [see recipe below]—it has sweet curry powder in the vinaigrette. And I also have a luscious take on Chicken Florentine that uses a Comté Curry duo in a main dish, with fresh cooked spinach.



Do you have any tips for cooking with Comté?

Just use it! I’m always amazed at how well it works in many kinds of recipes—not just French. I’ve substituted it for Cheddar in things like macaroni and cheese or Rarebit sauces. I love it on pizza instead of the usual pizza cheeses. I grate it over my Bolognese sauced-pasta, I use it in twice-baked potatoes, I melt it into sandwiches. I love it in omelets. Really—it’s just a great cooking cheese, because it adds so much to a dish.

What are your favorite wines to pair with Comté?

I love a Beaujolais cru (such as Morgon, Fleury, Moulin-à-Vent, Brouilly). The fruit in these light-bodied red underscores the fruity side of the Comté. Plus, they’re just such versatile food wines that they’ll mesh well many styles of dishes that call on Comté.

Chicken, Comté, and Spinach Salad with Apples

From The Bonne Femme Cookbook (The Harvard Common Press, 2011), by Wini Moranville

While traveling in the Franche-Comté region of France I’ve enjoyed a few main-dish salads that had been emboldened with a delicate sprinkling of Comté cheese, the region’s mighty take on Gruyère. The salads reminded me a little of the way that Americans sometimes shower chef’s salads with much larger planks of Swiss or cheddar. The difference, of course, is that a little Comté (in thin, delicate strips) goes a lot farther to add deep, rich flavor than three times as much domestic “Swiss” cheese. Once home, I recalled how chefs had expertly paired Comté with curry, and it wasn’t long before I came up with this French take on the chicken-and-greens salad.

Makes 4 main-course servings

- 1 1/4 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for brushing the chicken
- 1 tablespoon white-wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1/2 teaspoon sweet curry powder
- 3 ounces baby spinach
- 2 ounces Comté cheese, cut into matchsticks
- 1 tart red apple, such as a Washington Braeburn, cored and thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup walnut halves, toasted and chopped



1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Season the chicken breasts with salt and pepper and brush lightly with olive oil. Place the chicken breasts in a shallow baking dish and bake until the internal temperature registers 170°F on an instant-read thermometer, about 20 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a cutting board to rest until cool enough to handle.
3. Meanwhile, in a small bowl combine the vinegar with salt and pepper; stir until the salt dissolves. Whisk in the olive oil, mayonnaise, and curry powder.
4. Slice the chicken crosswise into bite-size slices. Place the spinach, Comté, apple, and chicken in a large bowl. Toss the salad with the desired amount of dressing (you might not use it all). Divide the salad among four plates, and top with the chopped toasted walnuts.