



## Five Easy Recipes Grilled Cheese Sandwiches for a Crowd

**Skip the skillet and turn on the oven: That's one secret to grilled cheese for a crowd.** BY MARÍA DEL MAR SACASA

YOU CAN MAKE grilled cheese sandwiches one or two at a time in a skillet, but surely I could devise an easy, efficient way to make them for a crowd. I started by assembling the sandwiches according to our classic recipe: We brush hearty white sandwich bread with melted butter (we prefer it to oil—who wouldn't?) and fill it with cheddar cheese; now that we're grown-ups, we've upgraded from the sliced American cheese we liked as kids. Because cheddar doesn't melt as readily as American, we combine it with easy-melting Monterey Jack. Shredding the cheese speeds up melting.

At this point, normally, we skillet-fry the sandwiches. Instead, because I hoped to make them for a crowd, I placed them out on a baking sheet and slid them into a 350-degree oven. Fifteen minutes later, the sandwiches looked baked, not browned. I increased the temperature to 450 degrees. I still had a baked cheese sandwich.

The test kitchen often uses a preheated baking sheet to jump-start cooking and crisping, so I tried the method here. I let the baking sheet heat in the oven as the oven warmed up. Meanwhile, I assembled the sandwiches. When the sheet was hot, I laid the sandwiches on it and baked them for three minutes. I briefly took the sheet from the oven, flipped the sandwiches, and returned it to the oven. After three more minutes passed, I was pleased to see that the buttered bread had gone from soft and pale to golden and crisp on both sides.

### TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Crowd Pleasers

It's a snap to make one or two grilled cheese sandwiches in a skillet, but what if you have a hungry crowd to feed? Ensuring even results while juggling multiple skillets is challenging. We devised a better method.



1. Place a preheated baking sheet on a cooling rack and arrange the assembled sandwiches on the sheet.



2. Put the baking sheet with the sandwiches in the oven, and place a second hot baking sheet, rim side up, on top.

Italian panini presses gave me an idea to make my cooking method even easier. I preheated a second sheet pan and placed it on top of the sandwiches in the oven. In six minutes, I had eight "grilled" sandwiches—no flipping, no juggling skillets, no making sandwiches two by two.

You can vary these sandwiches almost infinitely. We get you started with four variations.

### GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICHES FOR A CROWD

Makes 8 sandwiches

You'll need two rimmed baking sheets for this recipe, or see Test Kitchen Technique: Plan B.

**2 3/4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese**

**1 1/2 cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese**

**16 slices hearty white sandwich bread**

**8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted**

**1. PREHEAT BAKING SHEETS** Adjust oven racks to middle and lower-middle positions. Place 1 baking sheet on each rack and heat oven to 450 degrees.

**2. ASSEMBLE SANDWICHES** Combine cheeses in bowl. Brush one side of each slice of bread with melted butter. Flip 8 slices over, top with 1/2 cup cheese mixture, and compact cheese lightly with hand. Cover with remaining bread slices, buttered side up, and press down gently.



Our five recipes offer something for everyone, from the fussy kid to the sophisticated gourmet.

**3. BAKE SANDWICHES** Remove hot baking sheets from oven and place on cooling rack. Arrange sandwiches on 1 sheet. Return to middle rack of oven, and carefully place second sheet over sandwiches, rim side up. Bake sandwiches until golden, 5 to 6 minutes. Remove top baking sheet and transfer sheet with sandwiches to cooling rack. Serve.

### PESTO-CAPICOLA GRILLED CHEESE

Prepare Grilled Cheese Sandwiches, replacing cheddar with shredded provolone cheese. In step 2, layer each sandwich with 1 tablespoon pesto (you'll need 1/2 cup total), 1/4 cup cheese, 2 slices capicola or salami (you'll need 16 slices total), and additional 1/4 cup cheese.

### PEAR-WALNUT-GORGONZOLA GRILLED CHEESE

Prepare Grilled Cheese Sandwiches, replacing cheddar with Gorgonzola cheese (you'll need 10 ounces total) and sandwich bread with 16 slices cinnamon-raisin bread. In step 2, spread each sandwich with 1 tablespoon honey (you'll need 1/2 cup total), then layer with 1/4 cup cheese, 1 tablespoon chopped toasted walnuts (you'll need 1/2 cup total), a few pear slices (you'll need 2 pears total), and additional 1/4 cup cheese.

### HAM-RED PEPPER JELLY GRILLED CHEESE

Prepare Grilled Cheese Sandwiches. In step 2, spread each sandwich with 1 tablespoon red pepper jelly (you'll need 1/2 cup total) and then layer with 1/4 cup cheese, 1 slice ham (you'll need 8 slices total), and additional 1/4 cup cheese.

### SMOKED TURKEY-CHUTNEY GRILLED CHEESE

Prepare Grilled Cheese Sandwiches. In step 2, spread each sandwich with 1 tablespoon chutney (you'll need 1/2 cup total) and then layer with 1/4 cup cheese, a few onion slices (you'll need about 1/2 red onion total), 1 slice smoked turkey or chicken (you'll need 8 slices total), and additional 1/4 cup cheese.

### TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Plan B

If you have only 1 baking sheet, place it on the middle rack and follow the recipe up to step 3. Place the sandwiches on the heated sheet and bake for 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer the tray to a cooling rack, carefully flip the sandwiches with a spatula, and return to the oven for another 3 to 4 minutes, until crisp and golden.