



# Irish Black Butter

## A Modern Revival of an Ancient Tradition

*In the windswept orchards of Northern Ireland, where generations of growers have tended apple trees, a centuries-old culinary tradition has been brought back to life in a way that's capturing attention across the gourmet world. This is the story of Irish Black Butter - a product that is as deeply rooted in Irish culture as it is versatile in today's kitchens.*



### A Taste Born From Irish Heritage

The idea behind black butter (or “apple butter” in some rural traditions) stretches back hundreds of years. Historically, communities gathered in harvest season to simmer apples, sugar, and spices in large pots over open fires. The result was a thick, dark, sweet-savoury preserve that kept well through the winter and served as a staple in rural households.

In 2017, entrepreneur Alastair Bell from Portrush recognized the potential to revive this heritage in a modern form. Using the famed Armagh Bramley apples (a product with EU Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status) he created Irish Black Butter, a glossy, almost molasses-like conserve enriched with warm spices, cider, treacle, and a touch of brandy.

The result? A product uniquely Irish, yet universally appealing: rich, silky, and deeply flavourful.

### What Does Black Butter Taste Like?

Irish Black Butter is often described as a preserve, but that hardly does justice to its complexity.

Texture-wise, it is a soft, smooth paste with just a hint of graininess – enough to remind you of its orchard origins. It spreads easily yet holds its shape, making it perfect for cheeseboards and baking alike.

On the nose, the aroma is intense and inviting: cloves, dark treacle, and liquorice rise first, followed by the warmth of cider and slow-cooked apples.

On the palate, the experience deepens. Flavours move between savoury, sweet and fruity – think toffee apples eaten beside a bonfire, the faint smokiness of charred liquorice, and the rounded richness of spiced apple compote cooked low and slow. There's sweetness, certainly, but it's layered and mature rather than sugary.

It's this balance of dark fruit, spice and subtle bitterness that makes Irish Black Butter so compelling with cheese.

### The Rise of a New Irish Icon

Since its launch, Irish Black Butter has earned awards and international attention. It's stocked in artisan shops, high-end retailers, and even the Houses of Parliament gift shop in London. Chefs use it in both sweet and savoury dishes, from glazing meats or swirling through desserts to spicing up cocktails.

But for many, its true magic shows when paired simply – with cheese.



## Perfect Cheese Pairings for Irish Black Butter

The sweet, spiced complexity of Irish Black Butter makes it a natural partner for cheese boards. Whether you're building an artisan platter or elevating a simple snack, these pairings showcase its best qualities.

### 1. Mature Cheddar

A sharp, crumbly cheddar – particularly an Irish or English clothbound variety – cuts perfectly through the sweetness and depth of the Irish Black Butter.

#### Why it works:

The butter's warmth and spice compliment cheddar's tang, creating a balance of savoury and sweet. Delightful with Golden Hooves Vintage and Mature Cheddar.

#### Try this:

Spread Irish Black Butter on a Peter's Yard Fig & Spelt cracker and top with a thick slice of Pitchfork Cheddar.



### 2. Brie or Camembert

Soft cheeses with a creamy centre and gentle earthiness pair beautifully with the rich texture of Irish Black Butter.

#### Why it works:

The creaminess smooths the spiced notes, making each bite velvety and luxurious. Delicious with triple cream cheeses, such as Brillat Savarin PGI or Brie de Meaux PDO.

#### Try this:

Warm a small wheel of Brie and drizzle Irish Black Butter on top for a show-stopping appetizer.

### 3. Blue Cheese

Roquefort, Cashel Blue, Young Buck, or Stiltonshine when paired with the sweet, fruity intensity of Irish Black Butter.

#### Why it works:

The saltiness and bold character of blue cheese find harmony with the preserve's dark sweetness, similar to pairing blue cheese with a fine port.

#### Try this:

Crumble a bit of blue cheese over crostini and finish with a spoonful of Irish Black Butter.



#### 4. Goats' Cheese

Fresh goats' cheese delivers bright acidity that balances the dark, caramel-like qualities of the Irish Black Butter. Local pairing: St Tola's.

##### Why it works:

The contrast of tart and sweet creates a lively, refreshing bite.

##### Try this:

Spread goats' cheese on toasted sourdough and swirl Irish Black Butter on top.

#### 5. Smoked Cheeses

Smoked cheddar, Smoked Gubbeen, or Smoked Lincolnshire Poacher bring a rustic edge that pairs beautifully with the warm spices.

##### Why it works:

The smokiness enhances the cider and spice elements of the Irish Black Butter, adding depth and complexity.

##### Try this:

Serve on a charcuterie board with walnuts and dried figs.

### Expanding the Pairing Possibilities

If we look deeper into flavour theory, the clove-led spice profile of Irish Black Butter opens up even more interesting cheese matches.

In The Flavour Thesaurus, Niki Segnit notes that clove flavours sit particularly comfortably alongside Gouda-style cheeses. Their caramelised, slightly nutty sweetness mirrors the dark treacle tones in Irish Black Butter. A well-aged Gouda or a British alpine-style such as Lincolnshire Poacher brings that same harmony of sweet, savoury and spice.

Equally, pairing with territorials such as Cheshire or Lancashire highlights another dimension. Cheshire's crumbly, mineral sharpness slices cleanly through the preserve's richness, while Lancashire's gentle acidity brightens the darker molasses notes.

For cheesemongers building boards, Irish Black Butter can act almost like a spiced membrillo – offering contrast, sweetness, and aromatic lift in one spoonful.

### What Else Can I Do With Irish Black Butter?

Beyond the cheeseboard, Irish Black Butter is remarkably versatile.

#### Baking & Desserts

- Swirl through cheesecake as a topping or ripple it into the filling.
- Use as a middle layer in a Guinness cake or brownie for a dark, spiced fruit note.
- Spoon over vanilla ice cream.
- Fold into whipped cream for a quick dessert topping.
- Add to apple tart filling to intensify flavour.



Black Butter Pudding with Irish Black Butter Toffee Sauce



## Savoury Ideas

- Glaze roast pork or ham in the final minutes of cooking.
- Stir into gravy for depth and sweetness.
- Add to a sausage roll filling for a seasonal twist.
- Spread inside a toasted sandwich with strong cheddar.



## Breakfast & Brunch

- Spread on sourdough toast.
- Add to porridge with toasted nuts.
- Dollop onto pancakes or waffles.
- Stir into natural yoghurt.

## Drinks & Entertaining

- Mix into a hot toddy or dark rum cocktail.
- Add to a festive cheese and charcuterie board.
- Use as part of a glaze for baked camembert.



## Elevating Every Cheese Board

Irish Black Butter isn't just another jar on the pantry shelf – it's a bridge between old and new, tradition and innovation. Whether you're entertaining guests or enjoying a quiet evening with a cheese board and a glass of wine, this unique Irish creation adds a level of richness and storytelling that few products can match.

From humble apples to global recognition, Irish Black Butter is proof that sometimes the best ideas come from looking back into history – and stirring it gently into something delicious.

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