

# Field Trip!

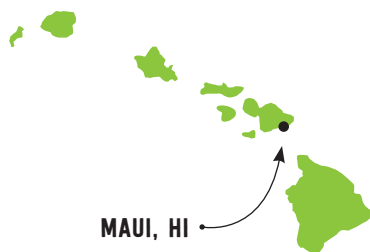
Three editors hit the road to get hands-on lessons in local food.



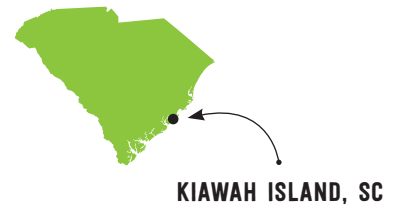
**CHEESE  
MAKING**  
*in Washington*



**CRACKING  
COCONUTS**  
*in Hawaii*



**SHUCKING  
OYSTERS**  
*in South Carolina*



# CHEESEMAKING *in Washington*



Anikah Shaokat, Assistant Food Editor



CHEESEMAKER PIERRE-LOUIS MONTEILLET GETS READY TO MILK THE SHEEP.



GRAPE-LEAF ASH GIVES SMOKY FLAVOR TO THE HEART-SHAPED LE KING NOIR.



THE BEST PART IS THE SAMPLE PLATE AT THE END! IT'S PAIRED WITH LOCAL WINE.

## MONTEILLET FROMAGERIE CHEESE WORKSHOP

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

**WHEN TO GO:** Offered in fall, spring and summer, by appointment  
**COST:** A one-day tour, workshop and wine tasting is \$200 per person.  
**TRAVEL:** Fly into Walla Walla Regional Airport; the farmstead is a half-hour drive away.  
**STAY:** The farm's guest house; \$250 per night. Or try The Royal Block in Waitsburg; from \$355 per night ([theroyalblock.com](http://theroyalblock.com)).

The first time I laid eyes on Monteillet Fromagerie, I felt like I was in a storybook. The 32-acre farm is nestled between rolling hills, vineyards and fields of bright yellow canola in Washington's Walla Walla Valley, and although Joan and Pierre-Louis Monteillet built it in 2001, the place feels like it has been here forever. The two are former wheat farmers who now raise goats and sheep, using the milk—and traditional French techniques—to make artisanal cheeses.

The couple hosts regular tours and workshops to explain the cheesemaking process, and I've lucked out with a one-on-one class. (Groups are capped at six people, but they'll host a workshop even if just one person shows up.) As Pierre-Louis hooks milking clusters to the animals, we chat. Cheeses range from soft-ripened—finished in as little as

48 hours—to hard ones that take up to a year. Most are one-third sheep's milk and two-thirds goat's milk. I could basically survive on cheese, but I confess to being a goat cheese skeptic: I find it too assertive and tangy. Pierre-Louis laughs and assures me that the high butterfat content of sheep's milk softens the flavor.

In the kitchen, I insert a cooling rod into the 10-gallon pot of pasteurized milk, then I whisk in starter culture and rennet and leave it to curdle for two hours. Once the curd forms, we cut it into chunks, ladle them into cheese molds and set them aside to ripen.

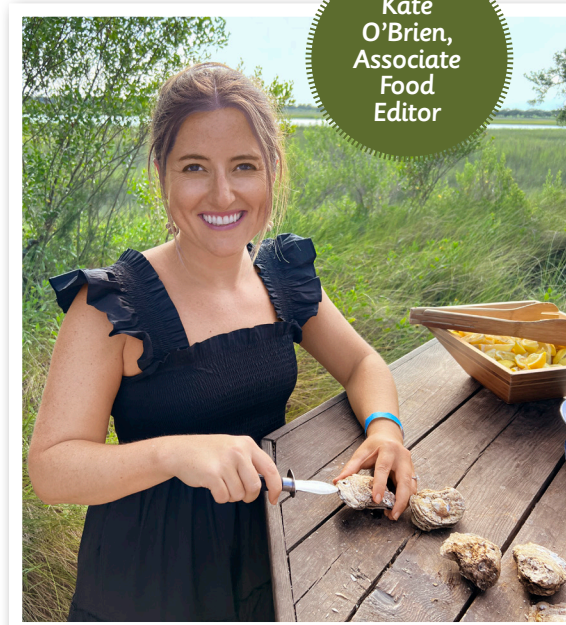
While it's fascinating to learn about the process, I am also here to eat! We try eight soft-ripened varieties, including a brie-style cheese with olive and truffle oil, herbs and pink peppercorns. They are officially the best cheeses I've ever had: creamy and ever-so-slightly tangy. With each bite, my goat-cheese skepticism melts away.

# SHUCKING OYSTERS *in South Carolina*

I've learned lots of culinary tips and tricks as a food editor, but shucking oysters is one thing I've never tried. That's why I'm excited to get schooled at a traditional Lowcountry oyster roast—and to learn how to eat them like a local. The event at South Carolina's Kiawah Island Golf Resort draws couples and families from across the country to the banks of the Kiawah River. There's only one prerequisite for the class: You just have to love oysters.

Upon arrival, I'm greeted by the smell of fire. Oyster chef M.C. Heyward, who created the roast more than 40 years ago (there's a plaque with his name by the firepit), is already busy dumping boxes of fresh oysters onto a huge griddle over an open flame. Eventually M.C. and his team push the shells into a single layer and lay wet burlap on top to steam them. In about five minutes, they remove them with a shovel and heap them onto tall wooden tables equipped with shucking knives, gloves and all the fixings.

Instructors are standing by to show guests how to pry open the freshly roasted bivalves. You start with the oyster in your nondominant hand, flatter side facing up. It's safest to use an oyster knife; the thick handle gives you a good grip. Under pro Andrew Moffatt's watch, I push my blade into the hinge of the oyster (the pointed end) and slide, wiggle and twist it until the shell pops open. Roasted



Kate O'Brien, Associate Food Editor



OYSTERS' TASTE VARIES BY THE SALT AND NUTRIENTS IN THE LOCAL WATER.



CHEF M.C. HEYWARD RAKES OYSTERS AROUND TO HEAT THEM THROUGH.

oysters are a little easier to shuck than raw ones, and within a few minutes, my fellow oyster lovers and I have a cocktail sauce and a squeeze of lemon, drop it on a cracker and enjoy—my reward for a job well done.



AW, SHUCKS! GUESTS DIG INTO THE ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT OYSTER FEAST.

## KIAWAH RESORT MINGO POINT OYSTER ROAST AND BBQ

[kiawahresort.com](http://kiawahresort.com)  
**WHEN TO GO:** Select dates April through November  
**COST:** \$55 per person  
**TRAVEL:** Fly into Charleston International Airport; the resort is a 45-minute drive away.  
**STAY:** The Kiawah Island Golf Resort; from \$250 per night (rates vary by season)

# CRACKING COCONUTS

*in Hawaii*

Carina Koeppicus, Senior Features Editor



**B**efore I visited Maui a couple of months ago, my experience with coconuts was limited to the canned coconut milk in my pantry. But here I am at a place called Coconut Information, staring up at towering palm trees and preparing for an immersion course on this mysterious fruit. If you aren't impressed by coconuts before you arrive, you will be when you leave. A single coconut palm can produce fruit for as long as 80 years!

The classes here are private, whether you come alone or with a group, and they're all an adventure. When it's time to learn how to crack open young green coconuts, the owner, Ryan Burdon, hands me a machete. I'm told to use a firm confident stroke and to hold the coconut steady at the stem. For older brown coconuts—the ones most of



OWNER RYAN BURDEN USES COCONUT HUSKS TO STOP WEEDS FROM GROWING.

us find at the store—you can whack the outside, around the equator, with the backside of a heavy knife or meat cleaver, until you hear a pop, then pry open the halves over a bowl to catch the juice.

At the outdoor kitchen, Ryan and I taste water from coconuts of various ages. They are remarkably different; coconut water gets sweeter the older the coconut is. He teaches me to cut long noodles from spoon meat, the kind found in young coconuts that's tender enough to spoon out, and I pan-fry them with a dollop of coconut oil, lime zest and a drizzle of tamari.

The thrill of this experience didn't end in Hawaii. Back at home, I've been blending frozen coconut chunks with water to make coconut milk, skimming off the cream then mixing it back in for a vegan half-and-half that's great in coffee. Ryan calls coconut an MVP—Most Valuable Plant—and once you've been to his farm, you believe it.

THIS PAGE PHOTOS: TIM O'BRIEN



GREEN UNRIPE COCONUTS TEND TO HAVE THE HIGHEST AMOUNT OF WATER.



NOODLES MADE OF "SPOON MEAT" FROM A 10-MONTH-OLD COCONUT.

### COCONUT INFORMATION TOUR AND COOKING CLASS

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

**WHEN TO GO:** Open year-round, by appointment

**COST:** \$400 per person/couple; \$500 for families/groups of six

**TRAVEL:** Fly into Kahului Airport in Maui; Coconut Information is a 14-minute drive away

**STAY:** The Lumeria Maui; from \$489 a night ([lumeriamauai.com](http://lumeriamauai.com)).