



Where We Live... A look at what makes France so special



CHEESE of the month



Pont-l'Évêque

This washed-rind cheese is probably the oldest Norman cheese still in production. Since the 1600s it has been called Pont-l'Évêque after the market town in Calvados, which became the principal distribution point.

Local legend has it that it was first made in a Norman abbey around the 12th Century. A manuscript from the time says a good meal always finishes with a dessert d'angelot, which may have been the old name for Pont-l'Évêque.

It is an uncooked, unpressed cow's milk (raw or pasteurized) cheese, square in shape, usually around 10cm square and 3cm high, weighing 400g. It takes three litres of milk to make one 400g cheese.

The central pâte (everything within the rind) is a soft, creamy pale yellow with a smooth, fine texture and has a moderately strong smell. This is surrounded by a washed rind that is white with a slight orange-brown colouration. The flavour should be rich and tangy. Avoid cheeses where the rind is brittle or cracked. Best eaten at room temperature, it goes well with Pomerol or Saint-Émilion wine, or cider.

Affinage (maturation) takes place at least two weeks from production, although six weeks is more usual. As the cheese ripens, the rind grows sticky and reddens and small holes spread through the pâte. Further ripening results in a pâte that glistens with fat when cut.

Production may be fermier, artisanal, coopérative or industriel. However, only around 2% are fermier cheeses. It is around 45% fat as a percentage of dry matter and is manufactured throughout the year. Acclaimed manufacturers include Lanquetôt, Levasseur, Lepeudry and Bisson et fils.

Pont-l'Évêque is recognised as an Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) cheese and regulations include the following:

- * The milk must come from a controlled area around Pont-l'Évêque extending to the departments of Calvados, Eure, Manche, Mayenne, Orne and Seine-Maritime.
- * The curd must be divided, kneaded and drained.
- * During affinage the cheeses must be washed, brushed and turned.
- * The cheeses must be one of three sizes – Petit, Demi or Grande.

Photo above: © Coyau / Wikimedia Commons



A beautiful garden is a work of art

You don't have to have green fingers to enjoy all the magnificent gardens just a short trip away. The sights, the smells, the sheer relaxation. Heaven on a warm summer's day. Your DSM has found a few to tempt you...

DEUX SÈVRES (79)

Jardin Médiéval de la Guyonnière

A drawbridge leads to the castle courtyard and then out onto an island surrounded by a moat, on which the medieval garden sits. It features nine different gardens appropriately planted with flowers, vegetables, medicinal and aromatic plants, old roses and fruit trees. There are vine and rose-covered arbours, a 500-year-old oak and an orchard of old varieties of apples and pears.

Where: 79420 Beaulieu-sous-Parthenay.
When: June 1–July 8, Aug 20–Sept 30, 0930–1200, 1430–1800.
Cost: Adults €3, under 16s free.
Contact: Tel: 05 49 64 22 99.
www.visit-poitou-charentes.com/Visites/Jardin-Medieval-de-la-Guyonniere

Jardin Val de Flore

Seven acres of flower gardens on the banks of the La Viette river. Here's a place of beauty rather than uniqueness. Wet and dry areas sit side by side in a garden where the visitor can savour both smells and colours.

Where: 79310 Soutiers.
When: June and September:
Wednesday-Friday 1400–1600,
Saturday and Sunday 1500–1830.
July and August: Wednesday-Sunday 1500–1630.

Cost: Free.
Contact: Tel: 05 49 94 02 76.
www.cc-pays-sud-gatine.fr/valdeflore/

Parc de La Sayette

Four enclosed gardens spread over three hectares. It includes a courtyard of topiary, a classic 17th Century garden with lawns and two 300-year-old sundials, a walking and discovery garden and a vegetable/orchard garden surrounded by 40 espaliered pear trees.

Where: 79340 Vasles.
When: Every day July 29–Sept 6, 1330–1930.
Cost: Adults €5, children free.
Contact: Tel: 05 49 69 94 93.
www.parcsetjardins.fr/poitoucharentes/deux_sevres/parc_de_la_sayette-650.html

Jardins du Domaine de Tournelay

Thirty hectares of landscaped park with exceptional views over woods, ponds, the river and a 6000sqm vegetable garden. Oh, and a 100-year-old wind turbine! Trees include various oaks and conifers, cypress, cedars and sequoias.

Where: 79250 Nueil-les-aubiers.
When: July 14-August 25 every day 1200-1800. All year by appointment.
Cost: Adults €4, under 18s free.
Contact: Tel: 05 49 65 61 13.
www.visit-poitou-charentes.com/Visites/Parc-et-Jardins-du-Domaine-de-Tournelay



garden heart!



Vive-Grosbot © fontainevive.com

Parc Imbert

Public terraced gardens offering a beautiful panorama of the Thouet Valley. Traditional flowering, with annual and biennial plants in one part of the gardens and a range of perennials and succulents in the other.

Where: 79100 Thouars.
When: April-November 0800-2200,
November-April 0800-1900.
Cost: Free.

Contact: Tel: 05 49 68 16 25. www.jardinez.com/Parcs-et-jardins-Parc-Imbert_Thouars

Jardins du Gué

This award-winning floral park of four hectares consists of seven gardens on the banks of the river Thouet in the heart of the Gâtine. Almost 2000 varieties of plants on view as you meander through the rose garden, a pine forest, wooded meadow, orchard and herb garden.

Where: 79390 Lhoumois.
When: Every day until October 31,
0900-1200, 1400-1800.
Cost: Adults €5.

Contact: Tel: 05 49 69 88 52
www.jardinsdugue.eu



Val de Flore © tourism-gatine.com

Arboretum du Chemin de la Découverte

A series of walks totalling 7kms takes you round more than 1400 different species of trees and shrubs from throughout the world. Birches, hornbeams, ash trees, chestnuts, willows, rowans, currant bushes and lime trees. Includes a water garden and wildflower maze.

Where: 79500 Melle.
When: All year by appointment.
Cost: Adults €4.50, children under 16 free.
Contact: Tel: 05 49 29 19 10.
www.chemindeladecouverte.fr

CHARENTE (16)

Jardin de l'abbaye de Fontaine Vive-Grosbot

English-owned and a beautiful English-style garden set in a monastic landscape. Features masses of roses, herbaceous borders and an organic vegetable garden and orchard.

Where: 16380 Charras.
When: June 3,4,5 and every day from July
18-August 30 except Mondays, 1200-1800.
Cost: Adults €6, under 13s free. Visits with
English cream tea €12,50.
Contact: Tel: 05 45 23 02 00.
www.fontainevive.com

Les jardins du Chaigne

Beautiful gardens complement the 19th Century manor house in this Cognac producing area. Whites and greens dominate, roses are planted between small trees, a gentle water path and sweeping views of the surrounding vineyards. Plenty of topiary to admire.

Where: 16120 Touzac.
When: To October 31 every day but
Wednesday and Thursday mornings,
1000-1200 and 1400-1800.
Cost: Adults €5, under 12s free.
Contact: <http://www.jardinsduchaigne.com/>

Les jardins Ephémères

On marshland on the banks of the river Aume, these gardens are flooded every winter only to burst back into life in the Spring. Original works of plant art are created, with a new theme every year. Also games designed for children.

Where: 16140 Saint-Fraigne.
When: June 1-September 30, Wednesday-
Sunday, 1400-1930.
Cost: Adults €3, children €2.
Contact: Tel: 05 45 21 57 65. www.mag.plantes-et-jardins.com/idees-de-sorties/promenades/les-jardins-ephemeres-de-saint-fraigne

Parc et Jardin de l'Abbrègement

Notable for its walled vegetable garden in which all the vegetables and flowers are either yellow or orange in colour. There's also an arbour for gourds and marrows of the same colour. Also features an exhibition of land art made from trees uprooted during the 1999 gales. More than 170 varieties of oak.

Where: 16700 Bioussac.
When: June 3-5, July 30-September 18
1100-1900. Rest of year by appointment.
Cost: Adults €4, children €2.
Contact: Tel: 05 45 31 84 73.
www.jardinez.com/Parcs-et-jardins-Parc-et-Jardin-de-l-Abregement_Bioussac_Charente-Aquitaine-Limousin-Poitou-Charentes-France_fr_14834.html



Logis de Forge © jardinsdulogisdeforge.com

Jardin de Saint-Florent

An enclosed garden just a few hundred metres from the Château des Ducs and the river Tardoire. Small themed gardens with around 700 plants, including rare shrubs and roses.

Where: 16110 La Rochefoucauld.
When: May-September, Tuesday to Sunday,
1400-1800.
Cost: Adults €4, under 16s free.
Contact: Tel: 05 45 23 94 30.
www.jardinsaintflorent.com

Les jardins du Logis de Forge

Like water? Then you'll love this place. Several contemporary gardens linked by bridges and ornamented by bronze sculptures and inspired by its owners' trips to Japan. Trees and shrubs in abundance and natural flowers whose colours are based on a rural landscape

Where: 16440 Mouthiers-sur-Boëme.
When: May 1-September 30 by appointment.
July 1-August 15 daily except Saturdays,
1000-1200, 1400-1800.
Cost: Adults €6, under 10s free.
Contact: Tel: 05 45 67 84 22.
www.jardinsdulogisdeforge.com

Jardin Monastique Médiéval

Superb example of a medieval monastery garden, including a scent garden, a boutique garden, orchard, vegetable garden and even a witches garden! Excellent educational value.

Where: 16140 Tusson.
When: All year, Wednesday-Sunday,
1400-1800.
Cost: Adults €4, under 12s free.
Contact: Tel: 05 45 31 68 77
www.clubmarpen.org

CHARENTE MARITIME (17)

Jardins du phare de Chassiron

There are not many places you can get a bird's eye view of a garden, but here is one. It's designed around the points of a compass with a lighthouse in the centre and the choice of plants and layout are skilfully used to combat the forces of the ocean. There's also a lighthouse museum.

Where: 17650 Saint-Denis-d'Oléron.
When: Booking required. See website.
Cost: Free.
Contact: Tel: 05 46 75 18 62
www.chassiron.net



Phare de Chassiron © Wikipedia/LouvreMuseum



La Boirie © lesjardinsdelaboirie.com



Château Roche Courbon © larohecourbon.fr

Les jardins de la Boirie

A small, walled garden that boasts a wide variety of plants including an amazing collection of 150 species of sage!

Where: 17310 Saint-Pierre-d'Oléron.
When: Tuesday-Saturday 1000-1200, 1500-1900. Sunday 1500-1800.
Cost: Adults €5, children €3.
Contact: Tel: 05 16 65 44 36
www.lesjardinsdelaboirie.com/

Jardin du Château de la Roche Courbon

Known as Sleeping Beauty's castle, this magnificent garden dates from 1920 and is one of the department's must-sees. Formal gardens laid out around a lake with an avenue of lime trees. Seventeen types of apple and pear in the orchard.

Where: 17250 Saint-Porchaire.
When: Every day 1000-1200, 1400-1900 (1730 in winter).
Cost: €6.
Contact: Tel: 05 46 95 60 10
www.larohecourbon.fr/en

Les Fontaines Bleues du Château de Beaulon

Be impressed by the stunning colour of the water in a network of pools caused by red algae present in the Spring. The Jardin Bleu has swathes of blue plants like lavender and rosemary and on the edge of a wood lie the mysterious blue fountains.

Where: 17240 Saint-Dizant-du-Gua.
When: May-September every day, October-April Monday-Friday, 0900-1200, 1400-1800.
Cost: €4.
Contact: Tel: 02 46 49 96 13.
www.chateau-de-beaulon.com

Jardin de Château de Ransanne

Walled flower garden with an impressive collection of hydrangeas, an English rose garden and... chickens!

Where: 17250 Soullignonne.
When: July 1-10, August 17-31, September 1-30 (all except weekends) 0900-1200 and 1400-1700.
Cost: Adults €4, children €2.
Contact: Tel: 05 46 93 15 79
www.reve-de-chateaux.com/demeure/753-jardin-du-chateau-de-ransanne

Jardin de Pomone

Fruit-tastic! Discover edible fruits of moderate and Mediterranean climates. Weave between fountains to see a variety of fruit trees and shrubs set in beds and trailing over pergolas. The orangerie is dedicated to tropical fruits.

Where: 17400 Saint Denis du Pin.
When: July-September.
Entry: Adults €7, children 5-12 €5.
Contact: Tel: 05 46 32 32 38.
www.lejardindepomone.fr

Jardin de Diktyнна

Features a box maze, arbours, mosaics and stone carvings. Three paths take you through black, white and red themed gardens

Where: 17470 Dampierre-sur-Boutonne.
When: June and September every day 1400-1800, July-August every day 1030-1830, October and November Sundays and public holidays 1400-1730.
Cost: €6, under 13s €3.
Contact: Tel: 05 46 24 02 24
www.chateau-dampierre.com/

Jardins de Compostelle

High on the shores of the Lac du Bois Fleuri (lake of the flowery woods) sample olive groves, precious flowers, rare plants and produce of the land.

Where: 17250 Trizay.
When: June 15-September 20, Tuesday-Sunday 1500-1900. September 21-October 30 1400-1800.
Cost: Adult €3,50, under 14s free.
Contact: Tel: 05 46 82 19 64 www.trizay.com/jardins-compostelle-trizay.php

VENDÉE (85)

Jardin de La Logis de La Chabotterie

Historical garden restored from old drawings and now as you would have expected to find it in the 17th and 18th centuries. Flowerbeds, box and yew borders, vegetable, herbs and medicinal plants

Where: 85260 Montreverd.
When: October-March 1000-1230, 1400-1800. Closed Tuesdays. June-August every day 1000-1230, 1330-1800. September every day 1000-1900.
Cost: Adults €7, under 18s free.
Contact: Tel: 02 51 42 81 00
www.chabotterie.vendee.fr/

Le Jardin des Olfacties

Scents are the theme of any visit here. Almost 3500 varieties of flowers and plants are divided into 'room smells', inviting visitors to touch and smell the plants. Includes a tropical garden, Japanese garden and a bamboo village.



Where: 85220 Coex.
When: April-October every day 1000-1900.
Cost: Adults €7, under 13s €3.
Contact: Tel: 02 51 55 53 41. www.jardinez.com/Parcs-et-jardins-Le-Jardin-des-Olfacties_Coex_Vendee_Pays-de-la-Loire_fr_16048_vendee.html

Parc Floral et Tropical de la Court d'Aron

An exotic trip for the whole family. Orchids, iris, papyrus, eucalyptus, banana, waterfalls, ponds, rose gardens etc.
Where: 85540 Saint Cyr en Talmonsaïd.
When: June-August every day 1000-1900. September 1000-1830.
Cost: Adults €10, children €6.
Contact: Tel: 02 52 43 14 31
www.parcfloraldelacourtdaron.com/

Le Potager Extraordinaire

A botanical garden that collects plants from around the world. Almost 1500 varieties of plants other than cucurbits. See an exploding gherkin and a plant that emits a foul smell to attract flies!
Where: 85150 La Mothe-Achard.
When: July-August 1000-1900, September-October Friday-Monday 1400-1830.
Cost: Adults €7,50, under 18s €4.
Contact: Tel: 02 51 46 67 83
www.potagerextraordinaire.com/

Le Jardin Dumaine

Cited among the most beautiful gardens in France. Sumptuous alley of yew trees dating from the 1830s. At dusk in July 3500 lamps are lit and concerts are held in the outdoor theatre.

Where: 85403 Luzon.
When: Every day. Summer 0900-2100, winter 0900-1900.
Cost: Free.
Contact: Tel: 08 99 23 14 79
www.vendee-tourism.co.uk

Jardins de la Maison de la Vie Rurale

Nestled at the foot of the highest point in the Vendée are the gardens of the Permanent Centre of Initiatives for the Environment. Fun and education awaits with organic gardening and the tastes of ancient vegetables.

Where: 85700 La Flocellière.
When: April-October every day 1000-1800.
Cost: Free.
Contact: Tel: 02 51 57 77 14
www.cpie-sevre-bocage.com/

La Roseraie de Vendée

If you like roses you won't want to miss this three-acre garden by the sea. More than 8000 roses and 950 varieties. Colours and scents that will amaze you.

Where: 85220 St Révérend.
When: May-September 1000-1900. Closed Sunday and Monday from August 20.
Cost: May-June €4,70, July-September €2,80.
Contact: Tel: 02 51 55 24 03
www.laroseaievendee.moonfruit.fr/

Jardin de la maison Georges Clemenceau

Famous French journalist and former Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau created this impressionist garden along with his friend artist Claude Monet.

Where: 85520 Saint-Vincent-sur-Jard.
When: May 15-September 15 every day 0930-1230, 1400-1830. September 15-December 31 (closed Monday) 1000-1230, 1400-1730.
Cost: Adult €5,50, under 18s free.
Contact: Tel: 02 51 33 40 32
www.maison-de-clemenceau.fr/

Mick Austin is a freelance journalist based in the Pays-de-la-Loire. He has had his work published in several expat magazines and newspapers and has also written the Mayenne Tourist Board's only English-language brochure. He also runs a gîte business at www.gitafortwo.com.

DID YOU KNOW ?



At 3pm on Saturday, June 18 the world will go mad when a quarter of a million people cram into a corner of the Sarthe, partying like crazy. Booze, barbecues and blisteringly-fast racing cars. This is Le Mans!

Le 24 Heures du Mans is quite extraordinary. Petrolheads look on it as an annual pilgrimage where they can breathe in the fumes and talk turbos as their heroes flash by, lap after lap, for almost 3000 miles. Others treat it as one big carnival, soaking up the atmosphere, drinking, eating and meeting old friends.

You don't have to be a car nut to appreciate Le Mans, but you'd have to be from another planet not to have heard of the famous names associated with the event: Audi, Porsche, Jaguar, Mercedes-Benz etc. Perhaps even the famous Mulsanne Straight?

If a day or more without sleep gets you bleary-eyed, spare a thought for those racing. Flat-out speeds hour after adrenaline-packed hour means little or no rest for the drivers and their mechanics. Pit-stops for fuel and driver changes, mechanical breakdowns, accidents.

But even the most hardened car nut has to take a break some time and the organisers spare no effort to make the party go with a swing. The circuit has its own temporary little village of shops, stands, restaurants, funfairs and fireworks.

* If that's all a bit too hectic for you, Le Mans stages another fantastic car event on July 8-10. The Le Mans Classic is a chance to see Le Mans 24-hour cars of yesteryear in full race action – non-stop, day and night. It brings together drivers, enthusiasts, clubs and exhibitors in a more genteel atmosphere than the regular 24-Hours. It only happens every two years, so don't miss out.

More information:

www.24h-lemans.com & www.lemansclassic.com



On this month

June 2, 1740: The Marquis de Sade is born in Paris. An aristocrat and philosopher, he became notorious for acts of sexual cruelty in his writings as well as in his own life. He spent more than 30 years in prisons and asylums, mostly as a result of violence and sexual depravity involving prostitutes. His acts of extreme cruelty resulted in the term sadism coming into being to describe gratification in inflicting pain on others.

June 7, 1848: French painter Paul Gauguin is born in Paris. He worked as a stockbroker before becoming a painter in middle age. His work inspired artists such as Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso.



Paul Gauguin, self portrait 1903

June 11, 1910: Undersea explorer Jacques Cousteau is born in Saint-André-de-Cubzac, in the Gironde. In 1943 he helped invent the first underwater breathing apparatus, the aqualung. His award-winning TV series, The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau, on his ship the Calypso, premiered in 1968.

June 6, 1944: D-Day, the largest amphibious landing in history, begins in the early morning as Allied forces land on beaches in Normandy – Americans on Omaha and Utah and British and Canadian forces farther east on Gold, Juno and Sword. By the end of the day, 150,000 Allied soldiers and vehicles had landed, with 15,000 soldiers killed or wounded.