

Cheese Balls with Pignoli Nuts

I love cheese and always buy more than I consume. Through the years, I have worked out a number of recipes to use leftover cheese, so I don't have to feel guilty about it spoiling. This appetizer is best done with soft cheeses, like fontina, Camembert, blue, St. Albray, or Reblochon. Pear and dried cranberries lend a little sweetness and the toasted pignoli nuts add richness and texture—a perfect combination.

Spread about 3/4 cup pignoli nuts on a baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 400-degree oven for 6 to 8 minutes, or until lightly browned. Set aside to cool. Remove any skin or mold from enough soft cheese—one variety or a mixture of those listed above or others—to yield 1 cup. Break into 1-inch pieces. Put the cheese in a food processor with 1/2 cup 1-inch pieces of peeled pear or apple, 2 tablespoons dried cranberries, and 1/4 teaspoon each salt and freshly ground black pepper. Process until the mixture is still chunky but is well combined and beginning to stick together. Divide into 18 small portions of about 2 teaspoons each. Shape into small balls. Roll in the toasted pignoli nuts to coat. Refrigerate until serving time.

Makes 18 Small Cheeseballs