

Choosing ricotta

Cheese shops, upscale supermarkets and specialty stores are carrying more ricotta brands than ever. However, these products vary dramatically in moisture and texture. If a recipe specifies a brand, do your best to find it, or you may be unsatisfied with the recipe results.

- In my opinion, no other locally available ricotta beats whole-milk Calabro, made in Connecticut. Some stores carry hand-dipped Calabro, packed by hand in tins with drainage holes. It is light and fluffy, with soft, moist curds. Second best is the machine-packed Calabro sold in tubs. It's not as fluffy and delicate, but it remains a good choice.
- Bellwether Farms in Sonoma County makes excellent cow's milk and sheep's milk ricotta. It is drier than the Calabro and, perhaps because of the way it is packed, seems to have a shorter shelf life. Ask to taste before you buy to make sure it tastes fresh.
- The widely available Polly-O whole-milk ricotta contains stabilizers such as carrageenan, guar gum and xanthan gum. It is acceptable for most cooked desserts, but not ideal when the ricotta is uncooked, as in Whipped Ricotta with Candied Orange, Pistachios & Chocolate.
- Mozzarella Fresca whole-milk ricotta is grainy, with firm curds. It is not recommended for any of these recipes.