

Meta Description:

Why is cheddar cheese orange and is it the same with other cheeses? In this article, we explain what affects the color of cheddar.

Social Media Bits:

Have you ever wondered why cheddar has an orange hue? As you'll learn in this article, cheesemakers use a natural food dye. But before that, cows ate a diet that gave cheese a rich color. Read more:

Why is Cheddar Cheese Orange?



<https://pixabay.com/photos/cheese-cow-cheese-milk-food-cow-1163161/>

If cheddar cheese is made from cow's milk, isn't it supposed to be creamy white? Good question. That orange-colored cheese at the dairy department has probably caught your attention many times. In fact, most people associate cheddar with this pigment. So, why is

cheddar cheese orange, and does it have anything to do with cows or the [cheese-making process](#)?

Why is Cheddar Cheese Orange?

For the most part, annatto is what makes cheese orange, and cheesemakers use it to keep the appearance of cheddar consistent regardless of the time of the year. Annatto is an orange–yellow natural coloring that’s extracted from the seeds of the achiote tree (*Bixa orellana*) in certain regions of Central and South America.

Aside from cheddar cheese, annatto is used to color other products like butter, margarine, cakes, and packaged popcorn.

But what could be the reason behind the use of annatto? The truth is that centuries ago, cheese naturally had an orange–yellow pigment due to the grass that Jersey and Guernsey cows ate, which was rich in beta–carotene.

For those who don’t know, beta–carotene is a plant pigment that’s responsible for the orange pigment of cow’s milk (where cheese comes from), including other plant foods like carrots and squash. Not just that, but beta–carotene also gave the cheese a unique grassy flavor [*].

During winter months, these cows were fed with silage (grass that has been “pickled”) and hay instead of fresh grass. With lower levels of beta–carotene, a loss of color was evident in the milk produced. This led to cheesemakers compensating for this color change by turning to annatto [*].

Is All Cheddar Cheese Orange?

The answer is no. Some cheddar cheeses are orange due to the addition of annatto, while others — white cheddar cheeses in particular — do not use any coloring. Keep in mind that there’s no difference between the taste of orange–colored cheddar and white cheddar, except for their age, which affects their flavor.

Also, regardless of its color, cheddar remains to be a healthy option for most people. Some of the [benefits of cheddar cheese](#) include boosting satiety, which helps with weight loss, and making sure you get enough calcium and other essential micronutrients.

Is Any Cheese Naturally Orange?

No naturally orange cheese exists. Cheese without annatto coloring is off-white or yellowish, and not the rich golden color that resulted from Jersey and Guernsey cows feeding on beta-carotene-rich grass a long time ago.

In addition to cheddar cheese, other cheeses that use annatto coloring include Mimolette cheese, Gloucester cheese, Red Leicester cheese, and aged Gouda cheese.

When choosing the best cheeses, don't rely on color to influence your decision. Orange-colored cheese may give the impression of having a bolder flavor, but color has very little to do with cheese's taste and nutritional value.

Summary

As you've learned, what makes cheddar cheese orange is annatto, a food coloring that's added during the cheesemaking process. The same coloring used for cheddar is also used for other cheeses like Mimolette and Red Leicester.

While this orange color seems to make consumers like cheddar more, don't get confused — cheddar cheese, with or without any color, is healthy and delicious. Craving cheese already? Check out [Käze cheddar cheese bites](#) and [other classic cheese flavors](#). Our snacks are made from real cheese!