

Pumpkin-Shaped Cheddar Cheese Ball

Prep: 10–15 minutes | Chill: 4 hours | Servings: 10–12

This is one of my favorite kinds of recipes: something that looks ridiculously cute and like it took a lot of skill, when in reality, it takes about ten minutes and almost zero effort. A classic cheddar cheese ball gets a little extra flavor from fresh green onions, while a dusting of sumac adds a subtle tang and a beautiful, deeper autumn-orange color. Shape it into a pumpkin, let the fridge do the rest, and you've got the cutest little centerpiece for a fall dinner party, Friendsgiving, or Thanksgiving.

Ingredients

- 2 (8 oz) blocks cream cheese, softened
- 1½ cups finely shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided
- 3–4 green onions, finely chopped
- Kosher salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½–1 tsp ground sumac, for coating
- 1 bell pepper stem, for decorating
- Crackers, crostini, or fresh vegetables, for serving

Instructions

1. Make the cheese ball mixture. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the softened cream cheese, 1 cup of shredded cheddar, chopped green onions, salt, and black pepper. Mix until smooth and evenly incorporated.
2. Shape into a ball. Transfer the mixture onto a large piece of plastic wrap. Using the plastic wrap to help shape it, form the mixture into a round ball.
3. Add the outer coating. Spread the remaining ½ cup shredded cheddar onto a plate and sprinkle the sumac over it. Roll the cheese ball in the mixture, gently pressing the cheddar and sumac into the surface until evenly coated. Add a little extra sumac wherever you'd like a deeper orange color.

4. Create the pumpkin shape. Place the coated cheese ball in the center of a fresh piece of plastic wrap and wrap tightly. Using kitchen twine, wrap around the ball four times, creating eight sections that resemble the natural ridges of a pumpkin. Tie securely, applying just enough pressure to create defined grooves without cutting too deeply into the cheese.
5. Refrigerate. Place the wrapped cheese ball in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours, or overnight, until firm enough to hold its shape.
6. Unwrap and decorate. Carefully cut and remove the kitchen twine, then gently peel away the plastic wrap. Insert the bell pepper stem into the top of the cheese ball where the ridges meet.
7. Serve. Transfer to a serving platter or board and surround with your favorite crackers, toasted baguette slices, or fresh vegetables. Let sit at room temperature for about 15–20 minutes before serving so the cheese softens slightly and becomes easier to spread.

Tips & Notes

- Use freshly shredded cheddar. It gives the cheese ball a better texture and a more natural-looking pumpkin exterior than thick, pre-shredded cheese.
- Don't skip the green onions. They add a little freshness and savory bite that balances the richness of the cheese.
- Why sumac? It's naturally deep reddish-orange with a subtle lemony tang. I added it primarily for a more dimensional pumpkin color, but it also brings a lovely brightness to the cheese.
- Make it ahead. You can prepare the cheese ball up to 2 days in advance. Keep it tightly wrapped in the refrigerator and add the bell pepper stem just before serving.
- For the prettiest shape: Make sure the cheese ball is thoroughly chilled before removing the twine. If any ridges need definition, gently deepen them with the side of a butter knife.
- Storage: Refrigerate leftovers in an airtight container for up to 3–4 days.

A little serving idea: Place your pumpkin cheese ball on a wooden board with rosemary sprigs, assorted crackers, apple slices, and a few clusters of grapes. It makes an adorable autumn appetizer spread without much additional effort.