

# PECORINO

Cheese fiends, get your fill with this month's taste test, which takes a look at some of the most **delicious Pecorino** available – equally perfect for grating or for nibbling!

**T**he word Pecorino comes from 'pecora', meaning 'sheep'. And this makes perfect sense, as Pecorino cheese (in any of its guises) is made from ewe's milk. There are several different types of Pecorino available; the ones we have included in this feature are Pecorino Romano, Pecorino Toscano and Pecorino Sardo. All have DOP (Protected Designation of Origin) status in Italy, and are named after the region from which they originally hail. Each type of Pecorino has slightly different characteristics, and within these types there is yet more variation, depending largely on how long they have been aged for.

Younger cheeses are – of course – sweeter and milder, whereas the more mature Pecorinos offer a 'gutsier', sharper, and slightly nutty taste. Young Pecorino is therefore often seen as more of a table cheese, and the stronger stuff is reserved largely for grating onto food – its flavour makes a wonderful complement to many Italian dishes, and it is more robust than its more famous northern cousin, Parmesan (not to mention cheaper!)

## WAITROSE PECORINO TOSCANO

From Waitrose  
Price £18.50 per kg

Waitrose's Pecorino offering, available from the supermarket's fresh cheese counter, was a popular choice with the tasting panel. It's a classic Pecorino in the Tuscan style, with a firm bite but no grittiness to the texture. The cheese is smooth, with a gentle sweetness and a pleasing chestnut finish. Described as "a good all-rounder" by one judge – you won't go wrong with this one.



**VERDICT** ★★★★★

A delightful Tuscan Pecorino that would be equally at home sprinkled on your food or eaten on its own. A very good buy.

## VALLEBONA PECORINO FIORE SARDO, 200G £5.19

From Vallebona [www.vallebona.co.uk](http://www.vallebona.co.uk)  
Price £5.19/200g



The winning cheese managed to bowl over the entire judging panel – no mean feat, when faced with the contrasting tastes and preferences held by members of the panel (who failed to agree completely on any other cheese!). In texture, this cheese was far and away the finest: hard, slightly gritty and satisfying in the mouth. Vallebona's Pecorino fared even better in terms of the flavour test, boasting a really well-rounded taste. It initially gives off a slightly citrus tone, which soon gives way to a gentle nuttiness and creaminess. It is mild, but has enough sharpness and character to make it a 'true' Pecorino Sardo – and to make it a must-buy for your fridge, whether you want to grate it into your food or pop it on your cheeseboard.



**VERDICT** ★★★★★

A wonderful example of a great Sardinian Pecorino: smooth, rounded, with a perfect texture and flavour.

## JUST SO ITALIAN PECORINO IN Fieno

From Just so Italian [www.justsoitalian.co.uk](http://www.justsoitalian.co.uk)  
Price £6.70/200g

This is something a bit different and unusual that may appeal to anyone seeking a variation on the traditional Pecorino flavour. This cheese has been aged in hay – an ancient custom to accent the traditional "bite" of Pecorino with the herbaceous, flowery notes of the hay. This cheese has a good texture, but packs a strong, bitter taste, which was a little too aggressive for the judges.



**VERDICT** ★★

This was an unusual and interesting contender, but ultimately its flavour was a little on the overpowering side.

## NATOORA PECORINO ROMANO

From Natoora [www.natoora.co.uk](http://www.natoora.co.uk)

Price £5.99/300g

The Pecorino Romano is Natoora's most popular Pecorino. It is the most mature (up to a year ageing) of their Pecorinos, with a hard rind and a yellowish interior. Most of the panel liked this cheese for its firm, but nicely crumbly texture. It is also one of the grainier cheeses from the taste test, giving it a nice bit of "crunch". Flavour-wise this cheese offers up definite tones of hazelnut, and a typical sharpness. It is also an extremely salty cheese, which makes it a little overpowering, but great for aficionados of strong cheese.



### VERDICT ★★★

A good result for this salty Pecorino. To eat on its own, match with the right wine – maybe a rich Chianti or crisp Chardonnay.

## ARGIOLAS GIGLIO SARDO PECORINO

From Something Italian [www.something-italian.com](http://www.something-italian.com)

Price £3.50/200g

Although the tight plastic packaging made this cheese a little sweaty on first setting it free, once it was allowed to breathe for a few moments, the Pecorino demonstrated a good firmness. Taste-wise, this is a gentle little number with a hint of brazil nut and citrus that mellows to a creamy mildness. Definitely a cheese that you could eat with food or on its own, and it was popular with most of the panel – only losing marks for its dubious initial texture.



### VERDICT ★★★

Firm, and with a really pleasant flavour. Only marred a little by the packaging, which made the cheese somewhat sweaty.

## VALVONA & CROLLA PECORINO SARACENO SARDO

From Valvona & Crolla, [www.valvonacrolla.co.uk](http://www.valvonacrolla.co.uk)

Price £8.40/250g

A creamier, milder option than the other cheeses featured. This Sardinian Pecorino was a big hit with *Italia!*'s panel. The texture isn't as hard as you may expect from a typical Pecorino, but it is very, very pleasant, and the flavour is beautifully rounded, with just the right balance of saltiness, creaminess and nuttiness.



### VERDICT ★★★★★

A close runner-up for the top slot, and something of a dangerous option: a cheese that you could just eat and eat!

## SAINSBURY'S PECORINO ROMANO

From Sainsbury's

Price £2.21/170g

The problems with this Pecorino began on removing it from its packaging – the plastic gives it a somewhat sweaty and rubbery look. On tasting, matters only improved a little. The tasting panel found the flavour unremarkable, if a little sharp on first bite, although it did seem to leave a lingering salty aftertaste, described by one of the judges as "cloying". The texture is hard but it veers towards the "chewy" rather than crumbly. The main consensus was that this cheese would be absolutely fine for grating onto your food, but it's not one for the cheeseboard or to nibble on its own.



### VERDICT ★★

A rubbery texture and slightly artificial aftertaste brought the score for this Pecorino down. Fine for grating on food, though.