

French-Style Ice Cream or French Ice Cream is ice cream made with a custard base that includes eggs. It is richer than regular ice cream, also called Philadelphia-, New York- or American-style ice cream. See Glace.

Soft-Serve Ice Cream or Frozen Custard is ice cream served at a warmer Soft-Serve Ice Cream temperature from a machine that extrudes the ice cream into soft, swirled peaks (see photo at right). Frozen yogurt is also available in soft-serve form.

With both ice cream and frozen custard, the ingredients are mixed at 21°F; then the ice cream goes into a hardening room where it becomes rock-solid at -40°F. Soft ice cream leaves off this last step. Soft-Serve Ice Cream is perceived as tastier because it is warmer and doesn't numb the taste buds. What we know today as "soft serve" or "frozen custard" and was originally regular "French" ice cream or "glace." Over time, the hard ice cream became known as "French" ice cream, and "frozen custard" became the term used for the soft-serve ice creams, which did once use a custard ice cream base.

Frozen Yogurt is made of low-fat or no-fat yogurt, sweetener, gelatin, corn syrup, coloring, and flavoring, churned in an ice cream machine. It can be found soft-serve or hard-packed. It both freezes and melts much more slowly than ice cream, since yogurt has a much higher freezing and melting point than milk. The beneficial bacteria *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and *Streptococcus thermophilus* are believed to be killed when the yogurt is frozen.

Gelato is an Italian frozen dessert—a.k.a. Italian-style ice cream made from water, milk and/or soy milk, combined with flavorings, sweeteners, and a stabilizing agent. Gelato comes from the Italian word for "frozen." Traditionally, it has had two major points of differentiation from American ice cream: density and butterfat. Unlike ice cream, gelato machinery whips almost no air into the product (i.e., much less overrun), resulting in a dense and more intensely-flavored product. For example, American brand Ciao Bella Gelato contains 20% air by volume (overrun) compared to Capogiro Gelato 60% in most American brands. Gelato is often described as having less fat because it's made with milk and only a little cream, whereas ice cream generally contains more cream than milk. However, there are two chinks in the armor of this traditional description. First, U.S. ice cream industry professionals dispute this because there is no U.S. standard of identity for gelato—see the NOTE below. In addition, according to a report in Dairy Foods magazine,* as there is no longer one style of ice cream in America, there is no longer one style of gelato in Italy: the style of gelato varies significantly by region. The magazine reports that in the south, particularly in Sicily, gelato is made with milk and no egg yolks, and sometimes includes a thickener such as cornstarch—the "classic" style. However in central Italy, for example, Tuscany, it is made from a milk and egg custard; in the north, it is very rich, as northern Italians use cream and eggs to make their gelato—a French custard style. But no matter what the recipe, all gelati have little or no overrun, the air that is whipped into traditional American ice creams to give it a lighter texture. As a result, gelato is denser than traditional American ice cream, and this density produces a more heightened flavor.

To proceed with the "classic" description, Italian gelato typically has 4% to 8% butterfat, although Ciao Bella Gelato, a leading U.S. brand, has 12% butterfat. U.S. ice cream must have a minimum of 10% butterfat, and superpremium ice creams in the U.S. have a butterfat content of 15% to 18%. The greater amount of butterfat in ice cream tends to coat the tongue and the taste buds. The lower butterfat level of gelato allows more of the flavor of the fruits, nuts, chocolate et al to shine through. In addition, gelato recipes tend to have a higher proportion of flavoring than ice cream. The end result is heightened flavor.

NOTE: According to Drs. Bruce Tharp and Steven Young, who teach ice cream industry professionals the science of making ice cream, the "lower fat and calories" descriptor often accorded to gelato is erroneous. There is no government standard of identity for gelato in the U.S., and the fat level in gelatos vary as much as those in conventional ice creams. The calories per gram are in the same range as ice cream: in fact, the lower overrun of gelato often produces higher-calorie level per serving than in conventional, high overrun, ice cream because of its increased weight per serving associated with the lower overruns. We have observed products calling themselves "gelato" that have the same calorie count as superpremium ice cream—e.g., 230 calories per 1/2 cup serving—and list cream before milk on the ingredients label—"northern Italian style." But with all that cream and egg custard, they taste like superpremium ice cream, not gelato. They may have low overrun, but so do superpremium ice creams. They're simply not a "gelato experience."

On a related note, we have observed anecdotally that some of the finest artisan gelato is not dense—the texture is ethereal. When we asked Jon Snyder of Il Laboratorio del Gelato in New York City why his gelato was not "textbook dense," he replied that typically, gelato in Italy is more dense for two reasons. The Italian machines tend to churn the product at a slower speed, thereby lessening the air intake. Also, Italians traditionally use recipes, with more milk and less cream, that take on less air and are more dense (milk doesn't whip up like cream does).

Glace (pronounced GLAHS) is French-style ice cream, also called frozen custard, made from a rich milk-and-cream-based custard that includes eggs. Not to be confused with soft-serve ice cream called frozen custard, which may or may not have an egg-custard base.

Granita (pronounced grah-nee-TAH, or granité, grah-nee-TAY, in French) is a semi-frozen dessert that is made with the same ingredients as sorbet—sugar, water and a flavoring, in this case a liquid such as fruit juice, coffee or wine. Unlike sorbet, granita is not churned in a freezing machine, but is poured into a large pan, placed in the freezer, and the frozen crystals are scraped from the top of the pan every 30 minutes or so. It thus yields large, frozen flakes, a crystalline appearance and a crunchy texture. Granita also has less sugar than sorbet or sherbet.

Ice Cream is a frozen product made from cream, often combined with milk, flavorings and sweeteners. It has a high percentage of milk fat (butterfat), and the minimum percentages are regulated by law. Often, up to 50% of the volume of a container of ice cream is made up of air, which is introduced during the whipping process.

- Premium ice cream generally has between 11% and 15% butterfat and 60% to 90% overrun, which is the air that is pumped into the ice cream. This creates a denser, heavier, creamier, richer and more caloric product than regular ice cream, and is reflected in the price. Superpremium ice cream has even more butterfat—greater than 14%, with some having up to 18% and more—and less overrun, from as low as 20% up to 80%. Premium and superpremium ice creams come in more complex flavors in addition to the basic ones. The superpremium category includes smaller companies that make interesting gourmet flavors. In addition to lower overrun and greater butterfat, the third way in which a superpremium ice cream can be made more rich is by using an egg custard base, which is known as French or French-style ice cream.

* Pumpkin Ice Cream Cone Regular ice cream is less dense: it contains 10% to 11% butterfat and more air, 90% to 100% overrun. It is usually sold in the more standard flavors, since the added ingredients of fancy flavors add to the cost. Some people prefer the texture and lesser degree of richness, and prefer it in milkshakes and malteds where the subtlety of the richer ice cream can be lost (or is overkill). By the way, 29% of ice cream sold in America is vanilla, 9% is chocolate, and strawberry and butter pecan are tie for third with 5.3% each. However, these are the flavors most sold in bulk at supermarkets, so the numbers are not that surprising. And it means that 51.4% of the flavors are still favorites, like Cookies & Cream, Mint Chocolate Chip and seasonal specialties like pumpkin.

* Economy ice cream contains exactly 10% butterfat—the minimum USDA standard, and 95% to 100% overrun. It is made in basic flavors.

* Light ice cream means that there is either 50% less fat or 33% fewer calories than the company's standard ice cream*. Read the labels carefully: the "light" ice creams of a superpremium brand often have more calories than the "regular" ice cream of other brands.

* Reduced fat ice cream has 25% less fat than the company's regular ice cream*. Similar to the light ice cream analogy above, it can contain more calories than a regular ice cream of another brand.

Ice Cream Cake Ice Cream Cake can take two forms: ice cream in the shape of a cake, often with cookie crumbs or other small representation of "cake"; or layers of ice cream and cake. In the latter, it is up to the cake maker as to whether the middle layer is the ice cream or the cake.

Ice Milk is a low butterfat variation of ice cream, which due to advances in food technology over the last 20 years, has all but disappeared as a term, replaced by reduced fat ice cream.

Italian Ice is a smooth water ice, similar to a sorbet but generally a sweeter, snack product rather than a more refined dessert product. It is so-called because it is served in pizzerias and Italian ice shops, as well as by street vendors. Popular flavors include cherry, coconut, lemon and "rainbow ice."

Saffron Kulfi Kulfi is a dense Indian ice cream made with water buffalo's milk and flavorings like cardamom, chikoo (the Mexican fruit known as sapote), coconut, malai (almond), mango, pistachio and saffron. Kulfi sold in the U.S. is generally made with cow's milk. Unlike Western ice creams that are whipped with air, kulfi contains no air (overrun)—it is solid dense frozen milk. As such, it is not ice cream, but a different category of frozen, dairy-based dessert. Kulfi is also never made with eggs, like French ice cream. It is prepared by simply boiling milk until it is reduced to half; then sugar and a teaspoon of corn syrup is added and the mixture is boiled for 10 more minutes. Water is mixed in until it thickens into a paste and is boiled a while longer. Finally, flavorings, dried fruits or cardamom are added. The mixture is cooled, put into molds and frozen.

Novelty PopNovelties are single-serving frozen treats such as ice cream bars, popsicles and sandwiches.

Parfait, the French word for "perfect," is the originally French sundae, generally served with fruit purée. In America, it became a particular type of sundae, with syrup and ice cream layered in a tall glass, topped with whipped cream.

Philadelphia-Style Ice Cream is ice cream made without eggs. An egg-custard base is known as French ice cream or French custard ice cream, and is a richer style. Philadelphia-style ice cream is what we know as "regular" ice cream.

Semifreddo, which means "half cold" in Italian, refers to a class of semi-frozen desserts—semi-frozen custards, ice cream cakes and tarts.

Sherbet is a fruit-based product like sorbet (see below), with milk added to provide creaminess. By law, sherbet can contain no more than 2% milkfat, and ranges from 1% to 2%. The milk makes it slightly heavier product than sorbet.

Snow Cone, generally served in a paper cone or cup, is made of compacted shaved ice flavored with a choice of brightly-colored sugary syrups, usually fruit-flavored (apple, banana, cantaloupe, cherry, colada, grape, kiwi, lemon, lime, mango, orange, peach, pineapple, raspberry, strawberry) but also spice (cinnamon) and pop flavors like bubblegum and cola. Snow cones served in a cup are eaten with a spoon; those in a paper cone are eaten like an ice cream cone. Interestingly, snow cones are the descendents of the original "ice cream," which was snow flavored with fruit juice, created 4,000 years ago by the Chinese and learned through trade routes by the Persians 2,500 years ago.

Sorbet (the French word—in Italian, it's sorbetto) is a frozen dessert generally made from fruit purée or fruit juice; it can incorporate other flavorings including herbs and liqueurs. Unlike sherbet, sorbet contains no milk; however, in some regions of Italy (and in some U.S. recipes as well), milk or cream is used and there is no separate word to distinguish it (so if you steer clear of milk products, read the label or ask the waiter). Some sorbet recipes also use egg whites. Where gelato traces its roots "only" as far back as Renaissance Italy, sorbet dates to ancient Roman times. In the first century A.D., Emperor Nero, who had a hankering for the cold, sweet stuff, had runners along the Appian Way pass buckets of snow from the mountains hand over hand until it reached his banquet hall, where it was mixed with honey and wine. Pre-dating Nero, the Chinese have made concoctions from snow, juice and fruit pulp for several thousand years.

Spumoni is a Neapolitan specialty where layers of three different colored and flavored ice cream: Chocolate, pistachio and cherry are a popular combination. Or, more basic flavors can be used, with nuts and candied fruit added to the layers.

Sundae, a name invented in America (although exactly where is disputed—see The History Of Ice Cream) consists of one or more scoops of ice cream topped with sauce or syrup (generally butterscotch, caramel, chocolate or strawberry). Chopped nuts and whipped cream is generally added, and a maraschino cherry is placed on top. There are endless creative riffs on the sundae, incorporating fruit, cookies, candy, cake, marshmallow creme, peanut butter sauce, sprinkles/jimmies, and ingredients too numerous to list.

Tartufo Ice Cream Tartufo, the Italian word for truffle, is a ball of vanilla ice cream, often with a cherry and nuts in the center, enrobed in chocolate. The first chocolate ganache tartufos were created just after the French revolution by French chefs and intended to resemble the precious Périgord truffles, and were initially given as Christmas gifts. The ice cream version appeared around the Victorian era, when the molding of ice cream into flowers, fruits, and other shapes became popular.

Water Ice is a frozen dessert similar to Italian Ice, but often found in a wider variety of flavors.
Other Terms

Churning: The process of freezing a liquid mixture in an ice cream machine to minimize crystal formation while incorporating air.

Overrun: The amount of air churned into an ice cream or gelato during freezing. Super-premium ice creams have less than 50% overrun.

Quiescently-Frozen or Still-Frozen: Freezing a dessert mixture without churning.