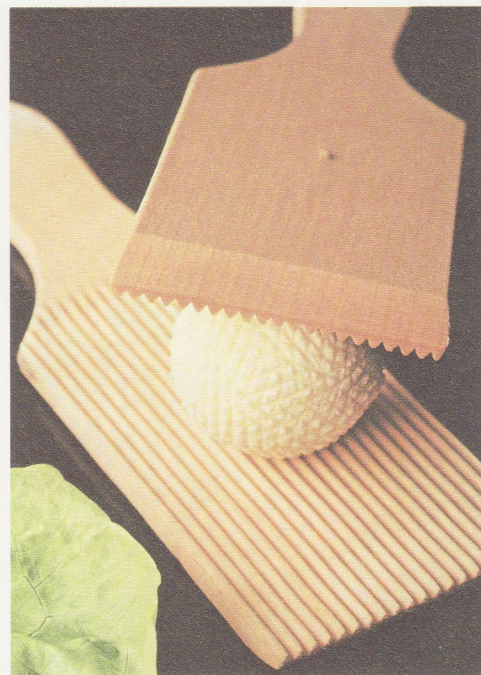


How to make butter shapes

Butter freezes well so it's handy to have pretty shapes stored away for when you need them. Freeze them in meal-size quantities – they take little time to thaw at room temperature. In a fridge, cover the curls or shapes with ice-cold water and drain well before serving



Decorated "stamps" give butter pats a stylish look. Before using wooden ones, pour over generous stream of boiling water, then plunge them into ice-cold water



Condition paddles by placing them in iced water for 30 minutes. Roll pieces of butter between the two to make criss-cross pattern on the outside of the balls



For perfect curls, butter must be firm and cold. Pull curler lightly over block and place curl immediately in iced water. Dip curler into hot water and proceed



Crinkle-cut slices need a deeply serrated knife – make the top and bottom of the block crinkly as well. Dip knife into hot water between slices for easy cutting

Different butters have different purposes in the kitchen: unsalted butter or clarified butter are best for shallow frying or sautéing, greasing dishes, making omelettes and delicate butter sauces, cream desserts, butter icings, brandy and rum "hard" sauces. Butter shouldn't be used alone when a high heat is called for during shallow frying or sautéing and the addition of oil, about 1 or 2 tbsp (15–30ml), will help prevent the butter "catching" and discolouring. As butter contains water, milk solids, sugar and salt, it burns at a low temperature.

The softer lactic butter, which is easily creamed, gives the traditional rich buttery flavour to Madeira cake, Victoria sandwich cakes, Genoese sponge, rich fruit cakes, puddings and sweets. A firm, sweet cream butter gives the customary flavour to pastries (it can be used alone or mixed with lard to give shortness), to shortbreads, biscuits and lemon curd.

Nutritionally, butter, with its high fat content, is a good source of energy. It also contains vitamins A and D, though the amount varies with the season – higher in the summer than winter (those pastures again!) – plus very small amounts of protein, milk, sugar and minerals.

Butter no parsnips . . .

Where slimmers are concerned, you cannot soft soap about butter. Figuratively speaking, it is bad news and should not be used to butter parsnips or anything else. How very apt are all the old sayings when applied to excess weight! When people go on a diet, they usually cut out sugar first, not realizing that butter and other fats are much higher in calories. Just work out all the things butter is added to – pastries, cakes, vegetables, scrambled eggs for starters – and see if you can cut down your daily intake to between 2 and 3oz (57–85g) which is considered the healthful amount. If you're really serious about losing weight you have to look at your whole fat intake, but try and cut butter down to 1oz (28g) a day to begin with. There'll be more about this subject in the section on Fats.