

How to Make a Basic Soft Cheese

This cheese is known as Baker's or Farmer's cheese. When made from goat's milk, and pressed into molds, it is sold as "Chevre". This procedure can take anywhere from 6-24 hrs depending on the milk, the flavor and consistency desired, and your lifestyle. Any one step can be prolonged or shortened, but better cheeses are made with patience.

Tools

Stainless steel pot with lid, thermometer, cheesecloth, knife, spatula or large spoon

Ingredients

Milk, Starter, Coagulant, Salt

Ripen Milk

Warm milk to 72F and for each gallon of milk add 1-2 oz of bulk starter or less than 1/8 tsp. freeze-dried dairy culture of a mesophilic type (aroma B or meso Type 1). Incorporate well and let stand 1-2 hrs.

Set Curd

Warm milk to 84F and add 1-2 drops of rennet diluted in a tablespoon of cold water. Stir for no longer than 4 minutes. If there is any indication of coagulation, stop stirring. It will take at least 45 minutes for curd to set. Keep milk warm without any disturbance until milk coagulates.

Cutting Curds

Curd is fit for cutting if it has pulled away from sides of the vessel, if when a finger is hooked under it, it mounds from the surface or when clear or yellow whey is seen in any breaks. Fit curd is firm and has a lit-

tle bounce. Curds can be cut with a knife into 1/2"-1" cubes. Try to have uniform size cubes so that whey is expelled evenly. Gently stir the whole to be sure no curd clings to the sides of the pot and that the temperature is even throughout.

Curds and Whey

Keep the curds warm, as fermentation continues the increasing acidity will expel whey from the curds. If left alone, the curds will become more firm and sink to the bottom of the kettle. When the cheesemaker decides that the curds are fit for draining (this is your big moment!) drain the curds in a colander lined with cheese cloth. If curds are firm enough, they will not stick and the whey will flow from the cloth. If soft, whey will take some time to be expelled.

Be patient; the cloth can be left in the colander until the cheese has desired consistency. Make a bag of the cloth and hang it, or tie the corners of the cloth into a knot and invert the cheese over the knot to speed draining.

Salting

Salt is a necessary ingredient for preservation and flavor. Salt to your taste but 1 tsp. or 1/4 oz. per lb. is the rule. Mix it thoroughly mixed into the cheese. Salting should be done when whey expulsion has slowed or ceased.

Uses

This cheese is excellent as pasta or dessert filling, as a spread, or in salads. It can be made firmer by pressing. The entire process can take up to 24 hrs. Timing of each step can vary to fit your lifestyle. Don't worry, just practice and learn to make the cheese the way you like it.

Basic Cheese Making



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Cheesemaking is one of the oldest food making processes...

For nomadic herdsman, cheese (milk with the water removed) was a nutrient rich food-source that was convenient to carry and keep. The character of cheese is closely tied to region in which it originates. The great cheeses of the world were developed in regions where abundant grasslands supported large herds and surplus milk production. The cheeses associated with different regions of the world are a function of climate and topography: arid and mountainous regions support goats and sheep, while flat and wet lands are better suited to cattle and bison. Thus the rocky Greek terrain produced the first fetas and kasseris from goats' milk, while Edams and Goudas came out of the Netherlands, which supports herds of large Friesians and Holsteins. The Vikings liked the compact Ayrshires that travelled well in their ships. In this way, Ayrshire breeding spread from Scandinavia to the British Isles, Iceland, Greenland, and the New World.

Among food making processes, cheesemaking is probably the most nuanced and requires the greatest degree of patience. Some cheeses are extraordinarily simple to make, others take years. This beginner's pamphlet describes the simplest and most primitive cheesemaking process.

Milk is composed of water (80%), fat (3-6%), and protein (3-4%). Along with lactose, minerals, and enzymes, these components are suspended as a colloidal system. The cheesemaking process extracts the 12-18% solids in milk and eliminates much of the

water, yielding "curds and whey." Warm milk creates an environment in which microbial activity thrives. Oxygen is limited, moisture and sugar are abundant.

Cheesemaking controls of the temperature of milk to either limit or grow micro-organisms. The cleanliness of milk and equipment for cheesemaking is essential for production of cheese with no "off-flavors".

The ancients relied on the microorganisms in their environment to "start" their cheese. Today, we have isolated the microorganisms that thrive on lactose and they are available as pure "dairy cultures" in convenient freeze dried packages. These are classified into diverse categories of flavor making, gassing or not gassing, and temperature tolerance.

Steps in Any Cheesemaking Process

1) Procure Fresh Milk

Pure, unhomogenized milk of the finest quality is most important.

2) Ripen the Milk

Innoculate with bulk starter or dairy culture or allow bacteria in fresh milk to grow. Select the appropriate culture for a specific manufacture. Warm to 60-72F for 1-3hrs.

3) Curd Formation

Rennet - vegetable, microbial, or animal - is used as a coagulant. It contains chymosin, an enzyme that catalyzes the protein and fat in

milk to bond with the calcium ions, "setting the curd". Rennet works best at temperatures between 72-104f. Most cheeses are set at 84-86F. Allow 45-60 minutes for curd to set.

4) Expelling Whey

Once curd is formed it is cut as uniformly as possible. Depending on the desired cheese, it is allowed to ripen (increasing acidity), heated, or is subjected to a combination of heat and acidification. Any heating must be moderate and even, and curds need to be stirred to prevent them from knitting together. The key decision made by the cheesemaker is when to separate the curds from the whey. At this point the die is cast for a particular cheese.

5) Salting Curds

Salt is a necessary ingredient in cheeses not only for flavor but also as a preservative. It is a general rule that curds are salted at 2% of their weight.

6) Forming/molding

Most soft cheeses require little forming: the curds are drained in cheesecloth and stored in containers. Hard cheeses require a rigid hoop, follower, and pressing.

7) Curing the cheese

Cheeses require a period of time at specific temperature and humidity to complete their transformation.