

Farmer's Cheese

- 1 gallon fresh whole milk
- 1 cup plain yogurt with active cultures or 1-1/2 teaspoons citric acid or 1/4 cup cultured buttermilk
- 1/4 tablet, or 1/4 teaspoon liquid, rennet
- 1-1/2 tablespoons salt
- 1/2 tablespoon white sugar
- optional: chives or minced chiles

You will also need:

- big pot with cover
- big metal slotted spoon
- thermometer
- long knife
- big metal colander
- sterilized muslin, napkin, dishtowel and/or cheesecloth to act as . . . cheesecloth

A note about milk: Making cheese requires that there be active bacteria in the milk. The more active bacteria, the easier it is to get a clean break and make cheese. I prefer to work with raw milk, because there are more good bacteria. However, raw milk is not always an option -- it must be legal for you to purchase in your state, and you must have a dairy nearby which sells it. It is impossible to make cheese with ultra-pasteurized milk (milk which has but been pasteurized at high temperatures). Unfortunately, dairies are not required to label whether the temperature at which their milk is pasteurized, and most high production dairies use different temperatures to pasteurize milk going out in different deliveries or to different markets (so that a commercial milk that worked one week, may not work the next). My advice is get to know the people at your local dairy farm -- they can guarantee you FDA-legal milk that has been pasteurized to 145-180 degrees, but which is not heated substantially more.

Make sure that *everything* is clean and sterile.

Make sure, *again*, that everything is clean and sterile.

Stop. Take a breath (nowhere near your sterile tools or your ingredients). And once more be *sure* that everything is clean and sterile.

No, you are not going to be performing surgery, and you are not even planning to age this cheese, but it's good cheese practice: You will get used to being careful for when you *do* make aged cheeses. (And you will make aged cheeses -- the path of the cheesemaker is a seductive one.)

In a heavy-bottomed pan (or in the inset for a large double-boiler), combine the milk with the yogurt (or citric acid or buttermilk), stirring with slotted spoon. Warm over a medium heat, until 98 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. If it goes over 100 degrees, cool it a bit.

Meanwhile, dissolve the rennet in 1/4 cup of cool water.

Add the rennet and stir for a minute or two.

Cover the pot, remove from heat (or take inset out of double boiler) and leave untouched for an hour.

Remove the lid of the pot, and stick the long knife in. Slice the curds lengthwise every 1/2" or so, and then the other direction every 1/2" or so, to make a crisscross.

Cover the pot and leave for another half hour.

Prepare the colander by lining it with sterile cloth.

Slowly empty the pot into the cheesecloth-lined colander, to separate the curds from the whey.

Combine the salt and the sugar in a separate bowl.

When the curds have drained enough that the consistency is close to cottage cheese, spoon the salt/sugar mixture in one teaspoon at a time, stirring and mixing it into the cheese.

Tie the cheesecloth and squeeze as much remaining water out as you can.

Hang the cheesecloth over a basin for about 20 minutes, so that it can continue to drain.

If you want to get fancy and add chives or minced chiles or the like, now is the time to do so.

Remove the cheese from the cheesecloth and pack in a container. Leave in the fridge overnight. Serve.

Serves: makes about a pound of cheese

Preparation time: about three hours (start the night before)

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