

Mozzarella Cheese

- 1-1/2 teaspoons citric acid
- 1 gallon fresh whole milk
- 1/4 tablet, or 1/4 teaspoon liquid, rennet
- 3-1/2 tablespoons salt (plain salt, no iodine or other additives)

You will also need:

- big pot
- big metal slotted spoon
- thermometer
- long knife
- big metal colander
- a second pot

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.)

Add the citric acid to a half-cup of cool water. Stir.

In the bottom of a double boiler, heat water to 110-120 degrees. Put the inner part of the double-boiler in, and add the citric acid. Pour in the milk.

Meanwhile, dissolve the rennet in 1/4 cup of cool water, and put another pot of water on the stove (which you are trying to get to 175 degrees).

Heat the milk, slowly, to 90 degrees, and do not go over!

Add the rennet by pouring through the holes of the slotted spoon so that it pours evenly. Stir gently for a minute or two (gently moving the slotted spoon up and down will help).

Let everything rest until the curd is set, about 5-10 minutes.

Stick the long knife in. Slice the curds lengthwise every 1" or so, and then the other direction every 1" or so, to make a crisscross.

Place the colander in a clean sink, while the curds set for another 2-3 minutes.

Slowly scoop the curds from the double boiler into the colander. Add a half teaspoon of salt and gently stir.

Get the hot (175 degree) water near. Divide the curd into a couple pieces, dunk in the water, and press/fold/play with. Stretch, ball, and repeat, until it pulls like taffy. Ball again or braid into final shape or shapes. To get fancy, flatten it, lay delicious things on top (eg. fresh basil, dried tomatoes and/or prosciutto), roll tight and put a toothpick in (the toothpick can be removed after the cheese has fully set in the brine).

Mix a quart of cool water with three tablespoons of whey and three tablespoons of salt, to make a brine. Put the mozzarella pieces into the brine, cover and refrigerate.

Serves: makes about a pound of cheese

Preparation time: about one hour

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