



Make Cheese at Home ... Overnight

Overnight Success: Make delicious cheese while you sleep.

By Tom Meade

About the Author

Tom Meade is a writer, beekeeper and vegetable gardener in Rhode Island. Making delicious cheese is so easy you can do it with your eyes closed.

After some simple heating and blending, milk ferments into scrumptious cheese overnight.

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Store-bought kefir is smoother and takes longer to thicken, resulting in a more sour cream-like cheese. With homemade kefir, four hours of draining produces cheese the texture of fromage blanc.

Whey good

Whey, the liquid by-product of cheese making is a healthy drink for you and your animals, even chickens. Whey also adds character to bread and soup when you use it in place of plain water.

Got milk?

Many varieties abound

Pasteurized cow milk makes the most consistent cheese from batch to batch, but it's not as exciting as raw cow milk or the milk from goats and sheep, which varies from season to season. In other countries, cheese makers swear by the milk of water buffalo and horses.

Top In the morning, simply drain off the liquid and you've got such treats as fromage blanc, ricotta, mascarpone and many others.

What's Cheese Anyway?

Basically, cheese is what's left when milk meets carefully cultured bacteria.

The bacteria eat the milk's sugar (lactose) and the milk separates into solid curds and liquid whey – Little Miss Muffet's lunch before the spider sat down beside her. Drain off the whey – but don't discard it – and you have cheese.

Top

Yogurt and Kefir Cheeses

Yogurt cheese and kefir cheese are the easiest to make if you buy the basic ingredients already made in the supermarket or your local dairy farm. (If you prefer to make your own yogurt, try these easy-to-follow instructions!)

Kefir is a fermented-milk beverage, purported to have beneficial effects on health, beauty and weight-loss. Some of the most popular commercial brands are available in the healthy foods area or dairy section of many supermarkets.

Using store-bought plain yogurt or plain kefir, the process is the same: Line a plastic or stainless-steel colander with two layers of cheesecloth (finely woven butter muslin works, too). Put the colander in a large bowl. Pour or spoon the yogurt into the lined colander. Place the colander and the bowl in the fridge for three to eight hours. The longer it drains, the drier the resulting cheese will be.

Top

A Few Pointers Kefir Differs

Making kefir cheese with store-bought kefir takes longer and produces a more soupy cheese than homemade kefir. Store-bought kefir is smoother than homemade.

Basic tools

An accurate kitchen thermometer that goes to 200 degrees (F) Stainless steel spoons and ladle Measuring cups and



spoons A colander Cheese cloth or butter muslin Bungee cord or strong twine

Sources for ingredients, tools and books:

New England Cheesemaking Supply

The Cheesemaker

Top With homemade kefir, four hours of draining produces cheese the texture of fromage blanc, because the liquid whey flows right through the cheese cloth.

In contrast, after 12 hours of draining store-bought kefir, the resulting cheese is like thick sour cream. After 16 hours of draining, the store-bought kefir cheese is thicker than sour cream and thinner than fromage blanc. With chives and powdered garlic mixed in, it makes a substantial dip, and it's great as a milk substitute in mashed potatoes.

Adding Flavors

If you plan to blend chives, dill or other herbs into the cheese for a spread, don't drain the whey for very long.

Try Different Dairies

Many regional dairies now produce their own yogurt, and each has a distinctive flavor and tang. Try all the yogurts made in your region.

Top

Add a Step for Other Soft Cheeses

Other soft, "fresh" cheeses are almost as easy to make overnight, with one additional step: After the milk is curdled, pour everything into the cloth-lined colander.

Then do this: Tie the opposite corners of the cloth together like a pouch Hang the pouch over a bowl that will catch the whey. When all the liquid drains away, the cheese is ready. (Tip: A bungee cord hanging over the kitchen sink works well, unless there's a cat in the house.)

Make It from Scratch

To make soft cheese, you can start with a powdered culture that generally comes in a small packet. Some cultures, like those from New England Cheesemaking Supply, have all the instructions you need on the package.

Here are the instructions that came with a package of culture for fromage blanc:

"Heat 1 gallon pasteurized milk to 86 degrees F. Add and mix in 1 packet. Let sit at room temperature for 12 hours or until thickened (as in yogurt). Ladle curd gently into a butter muslin lined colander, hang and drain 6-12 hours. Refrigerate and enjoy!"

It's really that easy.

Top