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Cheese making for beginners

The following recipe represents the ultimate in simplicity in cheese making. It will produce a delicious cottage cheese that resembles ricotta. I recommend that beginners start with a cottage cheese to get the feel for the basics and for the instant gratification of being able to enjoy the product immediately.

Ingredients:

3 litres 1 gallon 2% milk
1/2 cup vinegar
1 tsp salt

1. Heat the milk to 88°C 190°F. You will need a thermometer for other cheeses but you can get by here turning off the heat just before the milk begins to boil.
2. Add the vinegar and allow the mixture to cool.
3. When cool, pour the mixture, (which now consists of curds and whey) into a colander and drain off the whey.
4. Pour the curds into a bowl and sprinkle on the salt and mix well. You may wish to use less salt or more. It is simply a matter of taste which is the next step. You can add a little cream for a silky texture.

COMMENTS:

What we have just made is really cheese but short circuits the process in several ways. The vinegar provides the acid that causes the milk to curdle and produces the acid flavor. The traditional method of producing the acid is to use a culture of acid producing bacteria. This is more complicated and takes longer but as it is alive, the cheese will continue to improve in flavor with age. This is of little consequence in a cheese made for immediate consumption.

We have also made *small curd* cottage cheese because we left out another ingredient called rennet. This is an enzyme the produces a harder curd. It was originally made from calf stomachs but is now synthesized and available in liquid or tablet form. I believe the cottage cheese sold in supermarkets as large and small curd is a fiction because the ingredients on the label for the two products are exactly the same..



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Because both the bacteria and rennet can be destroyed by temperature, the traditional process requires several ripening steps at lower temperatures and a curd cooking step at a higher temperature. Because vinegar is inactive, we went immediately to the cooking stage and saved a lot of time.

Finally, the difference between soft cheese and hard cheese is that the latter requires pressing the drained curds in a cheese press, drying the pressed cheese and then aging for several months.



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