

CHEESE

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This cheese stands out among the others also because of the way it is made. Like all fresh cheeses, it is made from dairy, acid and salt. But the acid comes from a dairy product, the buttermilk, which is mixed in with whole milk. For that reason, the taste is perhaps more full than other fresh cheeses.

Buttermilk fresh cheese also takes particularly well to the addition of flavorings, such as dried herbs, vanilla or cracked pepper. I added lemon zest to mine, which was a delightful choice.

The simplest of the cheeses to make is farmer's cheese, which is cheesemaking stripped to its bare essentials. You simply heat milk and salt, add vinegar, strain the curds and whey through cheesecloth, press it into a disk and then refrigerate.

The taste is pleasant, but bland. So I spiced mine up just a little bit with chopped chives, but other herbs will do. Or there is plenty to enjoy about plain, unadorned farmer's cheese. If you keep some of the whey in it, you can spread it like cream cheese; if you make it dry and crumbly you can use as a much better (to my taste) substitute for cottage cheese.

Queso fresco is a popular Mexican and Latin American cheese; you can find it in any number of dishes from south of the border. It's dry and crumbly, but what makes queso fresco really stand out is the salt. This cheese packs a wallop of good, briny flavor.

I couldn't stop eating it by itself, though that is not typically the way it is consumed. Try it on tacos, enchiladas or tostados. Try it on eggs. Try it inside a rolled, warm corn tortilla, and then toast the tortilla on both sides in a pan until the edges turn crispy.

Or maybe best of all, try it in a salad with watermelon and mint or basil. But only if you can stop yourself from just eating it plain.

RICOTTA CHEESE

Yield: About 2 cups (8 servings)

4 cups whole milk
2 cups heavy cream
1 teaspoon kosher salt
3 tablespoons good white wine vinegar

Note: For best results, use the best milk you can find.

1. Set a large sieve over a deep bowl. Dampen 2 layers of cheesecloth with water and line the sieve with the cheesecloth.

2. Pour the milk and cream into a stainless-steel or enameled pot. Stir in the salt. Bring to a full boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Turn off the heat and stir in the vinegar. Allow the mixture to stand for 1 minute until it curdles. It will separate into thick parts (the curds) and milky parts (the whey).

3. Pour the mixture into the prepared sieve and allow it to drain into the bowl for 20 to 25 minutes, occasionally discarding the liquid that collects in the bowl. The longer you let the mixture drain, the thicker it will be.

Transfer the ricotta to a bowl, discarding the cheesecloth and any remaining whey. Use immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to 4 or 5 days.

— Recipe by Ina Garten, via the Food Network

BUTTERMILK FRESH CHEESE

Yield: 4 servings

1 quart whole milk

½ cups buttermilk (whole or low-fat)
2 teaspoons coarse salt
Optional flavors: 1 teaspoon lemon zest, 1 teaspoon dried or fresh herbs (such as tarragon), ½ teaspoon cracked black pepper

1. Line a colander or sieve with 3 layers of cheesecloth. Place in sink or set over a deep bowl.

2. Combine milk, buttermilk and salt in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Add any of the optional flavors, if desired. Heat over medium-high heat until mixture separates into white curds and translucent whey (low-fat buttermilk will separate at about 180 degrees, whole buttermilk will separate at about 212 degrees). If using whole buttermilk, remove from heat for 3 minutes.

3. Ladle the contents of the saucepan into the prepared colander. Let drain 1 to 2 minutes. Lift the 4 corners of the cheesecloth and gather them together. Gently twist the gathered cloth over the cheese and press out any excess whey.

4. Unwrap immediately and serve warm or let stand in cheesecloth until room temperature. For firmer cheese, refrigerate until cool, about 10 minutes, then remove cheesecloth, tent with plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to 2 days. Serve at room temperature.

— Recipe from "Simple, Fresh, Southern: Knockout Dishes With Down-Home Flavor" by Matt and Ted Lee.

FARMER'S CHEESE

Yield: About 3 cups

½ gallon whole milk, see note
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ cup white vinegar

Note: Do not use ultra-pasteurized milk, which will have a long expiration date,

perhaps 30 to 90 days from when you bought it.

1. In a heavy-bottomed large pot, bring the milk and salt to a slow boil. Keep the heat at medium or medium-low, to avoid scorching the milk.

2. When small, foamy bubbles begin to form on the surface, but it is not yet at a rolling boil, turn off the heat. It should be about 190 degrees.

3. Add the vinegar and stir the milk; curds will immediately begin to form. Let sit for 15 minutes. If desired, add additional flavors such as fresh herbs.

4. Place a colander over a large bowl or pot. Drape a dampened cheesecloth or dampened dish towel over the colander, and strain the mixture. Lift the cheesecloth and wrap it around the curds, twisting and squeezing to remove as much liquid as possible. The resulting curds will be dry and crumbly. If you want a creamier texture, mix a little of the reserved whey back into the curds.

5. To shape the cheese, keep it wrapped in cheesecloth and form it into a mound on a plate. Set another plate on top and press the curds into a flat disc that is 1 to 2 inches tall. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour before removing cheesecloth. Farmer's cheese will keep up to a week in the refrigerator. Use it as a spread, in recipes or as you would use cream cheese or cottage cheese.

— Adapted from thespruce.com

QUESO FRESCO

Yield: 8 servings

½ gallon whole milk
1/3 cup distilled white vinegar
1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
1½ teaspoons kosher salt

combine the eggs, sugar, butter, buttermilk and cocoa powder. Whisk until smooth. Add flour, baking powder and salt, stirring to combine.

2. Divide batter among four 8-ounce straight-sided canning jars; add 1 tablespoon dulce de leche to each jar. Place lids on loosely. Place jars on a rack in the Instant Pot; add 1 cup water to bottom of pot. Cook at high pressure for 7 minutes. Allow pressure to release naturally, about 7 minutes more. Remove the lid, being careful to direct the steam away from you.

3. Unmold the jars; serve the cakes warm with ice cream scooped on top, or allow to cool and tighten the lids, then serve cold or room temperature, plain or with whipped cream.

1. Line a colander with cheesecloth and place in sink or over a large bowl.

2. On medium heat, bring milk to 170 degrees, stirring constantly to avoid scorching. When it reaches the desired temperature, remove from heat and add white and apple cider vinegars. Stir a couple of times and let sit undisturbed for 30 to 45 minutes.

3. If curds are large, break them up gently with a knife. Ladle curds into prepared colander. Allow to drain for 30 minutes. Add salt and stir lightly.

4. Gather up edges of the cheesecloth and tie with kitchen twine or a twist tie. Hang from sink faucet and allow to drip for 30 minutes.

5. Remove the cheesecloth and gently mold into a flat disk about 1 inch tall. Return to the colander for 30 minutes. Then refrigerate until ready for use.

6. Serve on tacos and enchiladas, in egg dishes, in salads (especially with watermelon and mint or basil), topped with

flaky salt or placed in a warm corn tortilla, which is then toasted on both sides until crispy.

— Recipe by Analida Braegger via ethnicspoon.com



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INSTANT

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1 tablespoon olive oil
1 pound spinach, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
1 package (8 ounces) reduced fat cream cheese, at room temperature

2 eggs
¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 teaspoons dukkah, see recipe

1. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the olive oil, then add the spinach and garlic. Cook until spinach wilts, about 2 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Allow the spinach to cool. Squeeze out any excess liquid.

2. Combine the cream cheese, eggs, Parmesan, dukkah and spinach in a large bowl, by hand or with an electric mixer. Season to taste, then divide mixture among three 8-ounce canning jars. Cover loosely with lids, then set on a rack in the insert of the Instant Pot. Add 1 cup water to the bottom of the insert. Seal and cook at high pressure, 7 minutes.

3. Allow pressure to release

naturally, about 10 minutes. Remove the Instant Pot lid carefully, directing the steam away from you. Remove jars from pot; allow to cool on counter. Screw lids on tightly; refrigerate for 2 hours before serving as a spread with crackers, pitas and raw vegetables, such as carrots, sliced cucumbers and sliced red pepper.

DUKKAH

Prep: 15 minutes
Makes: 1 cup

You can easily halve this recipe, but it keeps forever. Keep it around as a seasoning for hard-cooked eggs, avocado toast, raw or cooked vegetables, meats (dukkah chops or dukkah burgers!), fresh cheeses, yogurt or add it to olive oil for a bread dipper.

½ cup hazelnuts, almonds, pistachios, cashews or a combination, toasted
3 tablespoons white sesame seeds
3 tablespoons coriander seed
1 tablespoon cumin seed
1 teaspoon fennel seed
1 teaspoon kosher salt

Place toasted nuts in a food

processor; chop coarsely. (Or use a mortar and pestle.) Heat a small dry skillet over medium heat; add all the seeds. Toast gently until golden and fragrant, about 5 minutes. Add to the nuts in the mortar or food processor, along with the salt. Grind coarsely. Store in a tightly covered jar.

CHOCOLATE DULCE DE LECHE CAKE JARS

Prep: 15 minutes
Cook: 20 minutes
Makes: 4 jars (4 servings)

You'll need four 8-ounce glass canning jars, such as Mason jars, with tight-fitting lids.

2 eggs
6 tablespoons dark brown sugar
¼ cup unsalted butter, melted
½ cup buttermilk
3 tablespoons cocoa powder
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon kosher salt
4 tablespoons canned dulce de leche

1. In a large mixing bowl,

shoots pinched.

• Evergreens can be planted or transplanted now to ensure good rooting before winter arrives. Water both plant and planting site several days before moving.

• Order bulbs now for fall planting.

• Set out transplants of broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower now for fall garden.

• Prop up branches of fruit trees that are threatening to break under the weight of a heavy crop.

If you have garden comments or questions, please write: greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!

GARDEN

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So they each have some benefits.

Garden Chores

• Madonna lilies, oriental poppies, bleeding-heart (dicentra) and bloodroot (sanguinaria) can be divided and replanted.

• Divided bearded iris now. Discard old and rotten parts. Dust exposed areas of rhizomes with Comet or Ajaz. Replant so the tops of rhizomes are just above ground level.

• If you want big dahlia blooms, keep side

DORY

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Is that what holds you now — the inability to improve on what could have been rather than what was? Could you have done better had you

known what you know now?

There is beauty and knowledge in the old times. There was opportunity and love, rejection and advantage. There were good times and bad times.

Look ahead — look behind. We are all connected to the

past and to the future, whatever one was and what it will yet become.

As for me, myself, and I — I was, I am, I will be.

Yes, bring on the "Olden Days" while I can still remember the happy times.

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