



Making Fresh Mozzarella

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Legend has it that mozzarella was first made when cheese curds accidentally fell into a pail of hot water in a cheese factory. This may have some truth since new cheeses develop because of mistakes. Although mozzarella is traditionally made near Naples, Italy from water buffalo milk, the quick, fresh mozzarella described here may be made from cow or goat milk. In this method the milk is made more acidic by adding citric acid. Then rennet is added, which causes the milk to separate into curds and whey.

Equipment

- Large pot for heating water
- 6- to 8-quart stainless steel pot (for milk)
- sharp knife
- small bowl
- 2 large bowls, about 1 gallon
- measuring cups and spoons
- slotted spoon (stainless)
- colander
- rubber gloves, food grade (optional)
- thermometer (reads from 0° to 220°F)*

Ingredients

- 1 gallon whole milk, as fresh as possible (pasteurized but not ultrapasteurized)
- ½ tablet or ½ teaspoon liquid rennet
- 2 teaspoons citric acid powder
- ½ teaspoon pure salt, or to taste

* *Calibrate the thermometer: Fill a container with ice. Add cold water. Submerge the stem, past the dimple on the stem, in the ice water. The needle should read 32°F. If not, while the stem is submerged, turn the nut under the dial so the needle points to 32°F.*

Instructions

Milk picks up unwanted flavors and bacteria easily, so care must be taken to avoid cross contamination. Sanitize all equipment and work surfaces. Wash with hot, soapy water. Submerge equipment in boiling water or in bleach solution (1 tablespoon plain chlorine bleach to 1 gallon water). Allow to air dry.

Place a large pot of water on the stove and bring to a simmer (180°F).

Add rennet to ¼ cup of cool, distilled water in a small bowl. Stir to dissolve, then set aside.

Dissolve 2 teaspoons citric acid in ½ cup cool, distilled water. Pour this with 1 gallon milk into the large pot and gently stir. Some curdling will take place because the milk is now quite acidic.

Heat slowly at medium-low heat until the milk reaches 88°F. Stir every few minutes to prevent the milk from scorching on the bottom of the pot. You will begin to see the curd develop.

Once the milk reaches 88°F, add the rennet and water mixture, stirring gently up and down for 30 seconds. Turn the temperature down to low. Heat until the milk reaches 105°F. Monitor the temperature carefully since this happens quickly. Remove the pot from the stove.

Developing the Curd

Let the milk stand quietly for 15 minutes at 105°F. Curd (white mass) and whey (greenish liquid) will now separate.

Separate the curds and whey

Cut the curd with the knife into about 1-inch squares. Let this rest for 3 to 5 minutes.

Using the slotted spoon, scoop the curd from the pot into the colander and allow the whey to drain into another bowl set below the colander. Rest the colander with curd in the pot of whey to keep the curd warm. Add ½ teaspoon salt (or to taste). The salt will work into the cheese in the following steps. You may now fold this curd over on itself as it drains to increase the amount of whey running off. The more you work the curd at this point the drier the mozzarella will be.

Set curd aside.

Stretching the curds

Pour some of the hot water that has been simmering on the stove into the pot and adjust temperature of the water to about 170° to 175°F. This will be too hot for bare hands, so wear thick rubber gloves or use the slotted spoon to work the curd in the hot water. Test the temperature of the water with thermometer.

Take about a third of the curd and place it into the hot water. Work the curd quickly at this point by pressing together and folding over in the hot water to facilitate even heating. It will begin to get sticky. As the curd begins to meld together, pull it from the hot water and begin to stretch it. If the curd does not stretch, check and adjust the water temperature and reimmerse the curd. At first it may be a bit lumpy. As the curd is stretched, it will become quite smooth. Stretch it out several times and fold it back on itself and repeat. If it begins to cool too much (you will notice it begin to tear), place it back in the hot water to reheat. When it seems to form a consolidated mass and develop a sheen, you are ready to pull it all back into a ball for your final cheese.

Stretching is an important step. It makes the cheese firm and stringy. If you prefer a softer texture, don't stretch as much.

Make a brine with 2 tablespoons salt and 2 cups whey and some ice. Place cheese in this brine. This will chill the cheese and help it hold its shape. Remove cheese from the brine to store.

You control the amount of moisture in the cheese by the amount of kneading and stretching.

Stretching the curd, microwave method

Place a third of the curd in the microwave on high for 30 seconds. Press the curds together to remove excess whey. The curd should begin to stick together. If it doesn't, the curd may need to be heated another 20 to 30 seconds. Continue pressing and kneading the curd together. Heat the curd 30 to 40 seconds more and start pulling and stretching the curd. The cheese will be very hot. Stretch until cool.

To Store

Place the cheese in an airtight container or wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate. Use this cheese within one week or freeze for up to one month. If your cheese is too soft to shred for pizza, place it in the freezer, then shred when it's partly frozen.

Whey may be used to make ricotta, fed to pigs or discarded.

Sources

Carroll, Ricki. 2002. *Home Cheesemaking*, 3rd edition. North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, LLC.

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