

Basic Hard Cheese

1 gallon fresh milk (the fresher the milk, the more predictable the cheese)
1/4 cup active cultured buttermilk (1/2 cup plain yogurt will also work)
1/2 Junket Rennet Tablet
salt

One gallon of milk yields about one pound of cheddar-style cheese. You may use skimmed or whole milk for this cheese, but whole milk makes a richer cheese. This cheese has no added color.

REQUIRED APPARATUS

- thermometer, reading range 0 to 225F (-10 to 110C)
- whisk or other effective stirring and mixing device
- Sterilized² stainless steel 4-6 quart pot¹ with lid. (A thick metal bottom prevents burning.)
- Long bladed knife (9-10 inches long)
- 8" strainer
- large handkerchief, sterilized by boiling and drying
- cheese pressing frame (4" diameter, 5" tall can, about 20 oz, ends removed, save one end for a follower)

PROCEDURE

1. **INOCULATE THE MILK:** The evening before you plan to make cheese, warm 1 gallon of fresh milk to 68F (20C) in the sterilized pot. Thoroughly blend in 1/4 cup buttermilk to inoculate. Cover inoculated milk with the sterilized lid.
2. **INCUBATE OVER NIGHT:** Let sit out at room temperature overnight.
3. **WARM THE MILK:** The next morning, gently warm the milk up to 86F (30C). Meanwhile, dissolve 1/2 tablet of Rennet in 1/4 cup cold water.
4. **ADD THE RENNET:** Stir the dissolved rennet into the 86F milk to mix thoroughly. Cover, let sit undisturbed for an hour or more in a warm place in the room. Be patient. Do not disturb the milk until it has coagulated.
5. **ACHIEVE A CLEAN BREAK:** Test for a "clean break" (completed action of rennet): Probe a clean finger into the milk and lift. If it has gelled enough to break cleanly as the finger is lifted, go to next step. If the milk is liquid or semi-gelatinous and softly flows across your finger, let sit until a clean break is obtained. It may take as long as 1-2 hours more. Be patient, do NOT disturb the milk.
6. **CUT THE CURD:** Once a clean break is achieved, cut the curd with a long knife: begin at one edge of the pot and cut straight to bottom. Cut repeatedly parallel to first cut, but increasing the angle of the knife until reaching 45 degrees at the other side of pot. Rotate the pot a quarter of a turn, cut as before. Repeat the rotating and cutting two more times, yielding 1/2 inch cubes of curd.
7. **SET THE CURD:** Place the pot over a low fire, stir curd with cleaned bare hand by reaching down to bottom, gently lifting and stirring. Cut larger curds as they appear. Do not mash or squeeze. Continue stirring for 15 min to prevent the curds from clumping together or overheating at the bottom. Warm the curds to 92F (34C) for softer curd cheese, or as high as 102F (39C) for very firm cheese.
8. **SEPARATE CURDS AND WHEY:** Stir and maintain 92F until curd has contracted to consistency of firm scrambled eggs. Remove from stove and let sit for 10 minutes. The

curds should sink in whey. Pour off the whey through a strainer and save for ricotta if you wish. Place the curds in a large bowl.

9. **ADD SALT:** Sprinkle two teaspoons salt over curds, working with hands to mix in. Pour off any additional whey.
10. **PRESS THE CHEESE:** Line a smooth-sided 4" x 5" tin can from which both ends have been removed with a sterile large white handkerchief. Place the still-warm curds into the cloth, press into the can. Fold the corners of the cloth over top of the curds and cover with the cut-out end of the can. Place a heavy weight on top to press down the curds. Let sit at room temperature for 12 hours or so.
11. **CURE THE CHEESE:** The next morning, remove and unwrap the cheese from the press. Rub the outside with salt, re-wrap with a fresh handkerchief and place on a rack in the refrigerator. Replace "bandage" when it becomes wet (daily at first). When a dry yellowish rind forms (about one to two weeks in the refrigerator), dip in melted wax, store in refrigerator for about a month (if you can wait that long). The longer you wait, the sharper the cheese.

NOTE:

1. Avoid aluminum pots because the acid will dissolve the aluminum.
2. Sterilize the pot just before use by pouring 1/2 inch of water in the bottom, covering, and bring to a rolling boil for at least five minutes. Pour out the water, replace sterile lid, keep sterilized pot covered until you are ready to add the milk.