

Mesophilic Starter Culture

Cheese cultures are necessary to inoculate the milk with friendly bacteria. These bacteria serve two functions. First, they cause the milk to become more acidic aiding its coagulation. Second, the bacteria help develop the flavor of the cheese.

Cheese cultures are divided into two basic types mesophilic and thermophilic. These terms describes at the temperature the culture thrives at. Mesophilic (from the Greek words meso - meaning intermediate and philic - which means loving) cultures thrive around room temperatures. Thermophilic (from the Greek words thermo - meaning heat and philic - which means loving) cultures require a higher temperature. Professional quality cultures can be bought from a cheesemaking supply company. They are usually available in a freeze dried form. A home-spun method is to use cultured buttermilk as a mesophilic starter or fresh yogurt as a thermophilic starter.

This simplest of cultures can generally be used for all recipes requiring a Mesophilic Starter. The taste of the final product will vary slightly from that of a true cheese culture.

1. Start with 2 cups of FRESH or store bought Cultured Buttermilk.
2. Let the 2 Cups of buttermilk reach room temp. (70 F/ 21 C).
3. Then allow the buttermilk to ripen for about 6-8 hrs. (Store bought buttermilk does not have a high enough concentration of bacteria to serve as a starter culture without ripening.)
4. The resulting buttermilk will be much thicker and sour then what you started with. It should have the consistency of fresh yogurt, if it doesn't let it sit a few more hours.
5. Pour this culture into a full sized CLEAN ice cube tray and put into your FREEZER. As with all steps of cheese making, cleanliness is next to godliness.
6. Once frozen, remove the cubes and put into a CLEAN sealed container or plastic freezer bags. It is a good idea to label the container to distinguish it from your thermophilic culture.
7. The resulting ice cubes are each 1 oz of mesophilic starter.
8. Add these cubes (thawed) to your recipes as required. The cubes will keep for about one month.

To make more starter simply thaw one cube and add into 2 cups of fresh milk. Mix thoroughly with a fork or a whisk. Allow the milk/culture to stand at room temperature (70 F/ 21 C) for 16-24 hours or until the consistency of fresh yogurt. Then follow from step 5.