

Tillamook Homemade White Cheddar Cheese

The recipe yields about 2.6 pounds of cheese per batch, though it will take a little time (4 hours cooking, 5 hours drying, and 90 days aging) before you can taste the fruits of your labor. If you can't wait that long, just go to the store and pick up a brick of Tillamook Cheese.

Ingredients:

1/2 rennet tablet (solidifying enzyme)
1/2 of culture in vial (lactococcus bacteria)
3 gallons of (3.2%) pasteurized homogenized whole milk
1 pint (2 cups) half & half cream
1 ounce(5 teaspoons) salt
1/4 cup cold water

Equipment:

Large cookie sheet
Cooking pot large enough to hold 3 gallons of milk
Sharp knife long enough to cut depth of cooking pot
Electric range
Instant read thermometer with a range from 80-120 degrees
Large wooden spoon or spatula
Large colander (at least 11" in diameter)
Cheesecloth: 20" x 20" square
Heavy skillet or other 4-5 pound weight for pressing cheese

Directions:

1. Crush and dissolve half the rennet tablet in ¼ cup of cold water and set aside. Allow the tablet two hours to dissolve.
2. Place the pot on a stovetop burner and add the milk and cream. The cream will bring the mixture to the desired milkfat of 4.2 percent.
3. Heat the milk mixture to 88 degrees, but quickly remove the pot if the milk exceeds 88 degrees.
4. Add the culture and stir it into the heated milk.
5. Let the mixture sit and "ripen" at 88 degrees for 45 minutes. This allows the culture to activate. The culture produces lactic acid to break up amino acids in the milk and bring about the flavor of the cheese.
6. Remove the cooking pot from the heat and add the dissolved rennet tablet-water mixture to the milk. Stir rapidly in one direction with a large wooden spoon and then back-stir for 30 seconds. The rennet will cause the milk to "set" or thicken into a gelatin-like consistency.
7. Record the time (called the "set" time) at which the rennet was added. You will need it as a reference point for steps #12 and #14. Let the milk "set" for 30 minutes without stirring.
8. Using a long knife, cut the curd into a crisscross pattern 3/8 inch square.
9. Allow the curd to sit and "heal" for 10 minutes without stirring.

10. Place the cooking pot back over a low heat and during the next 40 minutes, slowly raise the temperature to 100 degrees while stirring. Increase the temperature about 1 degree every 3 minutes, adjusting the heat if needed. When it reaches 100 degrees, remove the pot from the heat.

11. Stir gently and regularly for another 40 minutes as the mixture separates into solid curd and liquid whey.

12. It should now be 2 hours since the rennet was added. (Refer to your recorded time in step #7). Pour the curds into the colander, allowing the liquid whey to drain off for 10 minutes.

13. Place the mass of drained curd on a cookie sheet to “knit” together or congeal. With a spatula, turn the mass of curd over every 30 minutes for the next 2 hours. As you do so, the curd continues to knit. Wipe away the whey that drains off.

14. When it has been 3 ½ hours since the rennet was added, (refer, again, to the recorded time in step #7), slice the mass of curd into ½ inch cubes.

15. Using your hands, gently stir salt into the curd. This slows the natural production of acid. Salt also expels moisture and adds flavor.

16. Clean the colander and line it with the cheesecloth. Then pour in the curds. Form a pouch from the cheesecloth by gathering together the 4 corners and make a knot. Or wrap with a rubber band or a piece of string. Squeeze the pouch of curd until no more liquid whey drains from it.

17. Set the pouch in a location where it can continue to drain slowly for 4 or 5 hours under the pressure of a 4-5 pound weight. A heavy skillet or a sturdy saucepan filled half full with water work well as a cheese press. Do not put the cheese in a container-air circulation is important. After the cheese has been pressed, hang it to dry for 24 hours at room temperature.

18. Remove the cheesecloth. Seal the bare cheese in aluminum foil and plastic resealable bags. Wrap the cheese tightly and use a straw or household syringe to remove as much air as possible from the bag. Place this inside another plastic bag for added protection against unwanted bacteria. For best results, use a vacuum sealer if you have one available.

19. With a permanent marker, write today’s date on the plastic bag. Refrigerate the cheese unopened for 90 days. Be patient-opening the package lets in new bacteria. When your cheese is finished aging, open the package and cut off any bacteria that may have formed.

Now, enjoy your homemade White Cheddar Cheese!