

# Making Feta at Home

David Bleckmann  
[daveb@joyofcheesemaking.com](mailto:daveb@joyofcheesemaking.com)  
<http://joyofcheesemaking.com>

## Equipment:

One non-reactive pot large enough to contain the amount of milk you are working with (1-2 gallons equals 4-8 quarts).

One larger pot big enough to hold the first pot in a water bath. Alternatively you can place the first pot in a sink full of hot water, but this is harder to control.

A accurate, fast reacting thermometer. A good dairy thermometer is preferable with a large face and easy to read numbers. You need to be able to accurately read the difference between 1-2 degrees Fahrenheit (starter bacteria act very differently at temperatures only 1 degree apart). Digital kitchen thermometers tend not to be accurate enough. The thermometer needs to be able to be calibrated (boiling water is 212° F at sea level, water with ice cubes that has sat long enough so that the ice is the same temperature as the water is 32° F).

A knife or straight spatula long enough to reach the bottom of the pot when full of milk.

Quality cheesecloth. Common cheesecloth found in grocery and kitchen supply stores has too loose of a mesh and will require too many layers to work well. Purchase cheesecloth from a cheesemaking supplier or use old household linen, preferably not dyed. Muslin can be bought from fabric suppliers. 1 sq yard is enough for 1-2 gallons of cheese.

Colander

Some way to suspend the filled cheesecloth over a pan or sink so it can drain. This could be a hook in the ceiling over the sink or a shortened broom stick suspended over the pot used for the water bath.

## Sanitation

Everything that comes in contact with any ingredient should be sanitized. Boil a small amount of water in the cheesemaking pot (covered with lid) to sterilize it. Immerse all tools in boiling water for 1 minute or use a bleach sanitizer.

To sanitize with bleach, you must remove any organic matter by washing well with soap, then rinsing. A sanitizing solution of 2 1/2 teaspoons of household bleach to 1 gallon of water makes an approximately 80ppm chloride solution (50 to 200 ppm is required). Chlorine is inactivated by organic matter and light, so make a fresh batch for each cheesemaking session. I mix 3/4 teaspoon with 32 ounces water in a spray bottle (found at Home Depot) for a convenient sanitizer.

Clean your hands well and dip in sanitizer or spray with sanitizer. In commercial cheesemaking, cheesemakers are constantly dipping their hands in sanitizing solution.

Caution must be used with using sanitizer with rennet because rennet is very sensitive to its chemical environment. Use boiling water to sterilize the vessel in which you will dilute the rennet rather than a chlorine solution. Use bottled water for dilution. If you sterilize with chlorine sanitizer, add a drop of milk to the water before you add the rennet. The milk will neutralize any sanitizer. It will coagulate because it will be too diluted.

## Ingredients

2 gallons of whole milk. Pasteurized is ok, ultra-pasteurized will not form a solid curd and will not work.

1/2 teaspoon lipase powder (optional)

1 packet mesophilic Direct Set starter culture, or 8 ounces prepared starter

1 teaspoon Rennet (or amount recommended by manufacturer or by experience) diluted in 1/4 cup bottled or filtered water (don't dilute until ready to use, and see sanitizing issues above)

1/4 teaspoon 30% Calcium Chloride solution if using pasteurized milk.

Non-iodized salt (kosher or pickling salt)

**Note:** Calcium Chloride is available from cheesemaking or winemaking suppliers. To make your own 30% solution from dry

CaCl<sub>2</sub>, mix 1.2 ounce (approx 3 Tablespoons) of dry CaCl<sub>2</sub> powder to 3 ounces of clean water (bottled or filtered), then add water to make a total of 4 ounces. Solution will get quite hot while mixing!

## Method

If using lipase, dilute it in 1/4 cup water (filtered or bottled) and let sit for 20 minutes while heating milk in next step

Heat milk to 86° F.

Add mesophilic culture. Add lipase, if using.

*Wait 1 hour*

If using Calcium Chloride, dilute it in 1/4 cup of water and add.

Dilute rennet in 1/4 cup of water, and add. Stir 1-2 minutes and then stop stirring.

*Wait 1 hour or until a clean break is achieved.*

Cut curd into 1/2 inch cubes.

*Let sit for 10 minutes to allow curds to heal.*

Gently stir curds for 20 minutes.

Pour curds and whey through cheesecloth lined colander. Tie the corners of the cheesecloth together, suspend over a pot and allow to drain. Alternatively, the curds can be placed in square or round cheese molds and be allowed to drain on a draining mat.

*Drain for 2 hours.*

Place bag in a bowl, cover bowl with a towel.

*Age at room temperature for approximately 24 hours from start of cheesemaking*

Untie bag and cut cubes into 1 inch cubes. Salt with 4-8 teaspoons of salt to taste (less for fine grain salt, more for course grain salt). Gently distribute salt evenly among the cubes.

Place salted cheese in a plastic container with lid partially open to allow cheese to dry.

*Age salted cheese at room temperature another 24 hours.*

*Optional: Instead of aging a second day at room temperature, age for 30 days at 46-50° F, either in a plastic container with lid cracked or immersed in a 8% brine solution (see below).*

This cheese can be brined after aging, which will preserve it and give it a very strong flavor. Make a 8% brine solution by mixing 11.5 ounces of salt (aprox 1.5 cups kosher salt, or 1 1/8 cups pickling salt) in 1 gallon of water (reduced appropriately for the amount of brine needed). Add 2 teaspoons of 30% Calcium Chloride solution per gallon of brine to keep the cheese from disintegrating and add 1 tsp distilled white vinegar per gallon to match the pH to that of the cheese. If you save the whey from cheesemaking, you can make your brine out of that (and there is no need to add CaCl<sub>2</sub>) as long as you heat the whey to 190° F and filter through cheesecloth to remove the whey proteins (the filtered solids are actually ricotta cheese).

After aging, move cheese to standard refrigerator (~36° F). Keeps for about 30 days, or longer if brined.

## Milk Sources

Store bought milk that is known to work well for cheesemaking (see also <http://urbancheesecraft.wordpress.com/good-milk-for-making-cheese/>):

- Organic Valley Milk from Fred Meyers
- Sunshine Dairy from Alberta Co-op, Bob's Red Mill, New Season's
- Lady-Lane Farms <http://www.ladylanefarm.com> - not tested but looks promising

Raw milk (see <http://www.realmilk.com/where4.html#or>)

- Abita Springs Farm (Goat), Portland, Ed and Nancy Arcement, (503) 287-7773
- Old School Farm (Cow), Oregon City/Redland, John and Joanne Graf, 19360 S Henrici Rd, Oregon City. (503) 705-563