

Got Milk? An Introduction to Making Homemade Cheese, Butter, and Yogurt

Have you thanked a cow for your cheese today? Maybe it's time you did.

Milk-based products have never been more common in our diets, but we've also never been more removed from where they come from. It's easy to forget that those individually wrapped slices of canary-yellow cheese came from a living, breathing animal, and we lose part of our collective culinary heritage when we forget this truth.

While making dairy staples like cheese, butter, and yogurt are left to the realm of "experts" today, it doesn't need to be that way. Just generations ago, people would have scoffed at the idea of purchasing something as simple as butter, and few would even consider much of today's cheese to be real food.

But guess what? You can reclaim this lost art of homemade dairy products right in your kitchen—even without a family milk cow.

The process is easier than you think, the results are tastier than you can imagine. So, let's dive in!

The Long History of Dairy Products

Humans have been getting nutrition from animal milk for over 12,000 years, making it a staple food source for cultures around the planet. [Evidence shows](#) that Turkish cow herders may have been the first to drink milk and even inadvertently make butter when their saddlebags swished their fresh milk so much that they processed it into a less-perishable form.

Since that serendipitous discovery, milk has been transformed into hundreds of forms, many of which enhances its natural nutrition and prevents it from spoiling as quickly. While the average amount of [milk drunk per person](#) in America is going down, overall consumption of cheese, yogurt, and other processed dairy products continues to rise.

Is Homemade Dairy Healthier?

Making your own dairy products lets you have complete control over their creation, but will the result be healthier for you? According to some evidence, the answer is yes.

Every dairy product you buy from the store needs to be [pasteurized](#) before landing on the shelf. This means the milk was brought to extreme temperatures to kill off pathogens and potentially beneficial bacteria alike, resulting in a substance that might be safer but is devoid of some of its original nutrition. Likewise, conventional dairy products are injected with additives like salt, sugar, and preservatives, and are usually refrigerated for weeks before you buy them.

You have little control over the quality of milk when you purchase pre-made dairy products, but making your own lets you source the best milk you can, allowing you to seek out local options or even use your own from a backyard dairy animal. Even if you still stick with conventional milk

for your homemade experiments, you're still doing your body a favor by keeping unnatural preservatives out of your recipes.

Homemade Butter, Yogurt, and Cheese: Yes, You Really Can Do It

Stop thinking that only 'experts' can experiment with food chemistry and gain some confidence in your culinary abilities by giving these classic homemade dairy products a try. The second you taste the results, you'll wish you'd started years sooner.

Cheese

There are over a thousand varieties of cheese in the world today, and you're doing yourself a disservice if you don't learn to make at least one. This protein-packed food source is versatile in a variety of dishes, and a fridge filled with homemade cheese can be a saving grace for weeknight dinner inspiration.

For your first cheesemaking adventure, you can't go wrong with an old-fashioned farmer's cheese. With a texture comparable to ricotta, this mild cheese tastes almost exactly like cottage cheese, making it perfect for use in lasagna or cheesecake.

However, half the fun of this versatile cheese is finding ways to make it make it your own. Adding fresh chives, minced garlic, dill, sun-dried tomatoes or even basil is just the beginning of what you can do to create a phenomenal spread for your next event. Best of all, the production process is so simple that all you need is milk, salt, lemon juice, and a scrap of cheesecloth. No fancy ingredients required!

Once you master the fundamentals, you can dive right into artisan cheesemaking. Some necessary supplies for most cheese varieties include vegetable rennet, cheese salt, mesophilic culture, a cheese mold, and a kitchen thermometer. You don't need much else for most soft cheeses, but a Homesteader Supply cheese press and cheese wax are necessary for making high-quality hard cheeses like cheddar, gouda, parmesan and more.

If measuring out ingredients isn't your favorite, start your experiments with a Brooklyn Brew cheese kit instead. This lets you get the full cheesemaking experience without fear of messing up in the middle.

Butter

Do thick, yellow dabs of butter bring back memories of your childhood? You can enjoy that hearty butter again; homemade butter is easy to make, filled with healthy fats, and a brilliant way to make milk last longer in the fridge. For exceptional taste, try to source grass-fed milk for your butter. You'll truly taste the freshness of the animal's in-season diet, and your body will appreciate the higher levels of vitamins A, D, and K2.

Just one experience with making your own butter will be enough to convince you that it isn't a food that requires expertise. Best of all, your homemade creations can easily be modified with your great herbs and spices for an instant gourmet touch to every meal. Great-grandma might have relied on a butter churn as big as her lap, but you can easily make enough for your family with versatile modern churn like this LEM products glass butter churner.

To make homemade butter, all you need is a fresh cream (skim it right off the top of farm-fresh milk if you can!) and a glass container with twice the volume of the cream you add. Before you begin, let the milk sit in the container for several hours so that it warms up to room temperature and you start to see the cream thickening at the top of the jar. Then, shake or churn the cream until you get butter mixed with buttermilk, a process that takes about 30- 45 minutes. Shaking a jar vigorously enough to make butter will inevitably lead to aching arms, which is why anyone who's serious about this spread uses a butter churn instead.

Once the butter is formed, you need to strain out all the buttermilk (save it for use in pancakes!) and rinse the butter under cold water until it runs clear, ensuring all the buttermilk is removed so that the butter doesn't turn sour. Next, add salt to taste, pat the butter into a glass container, and get ready to enjoy. So long as you remove all the buttermilk, your butter will last for several weeks at room temperature, or for months in the freezer.

Just be warned; once you've had real butter, it's hard to go back to the pallid grocery store varieties instead.

Yogurt

Yogurt has gone through a major rebrand in recent years, with more flavors and textures available at the grocery store than ever before. But don't let those fancy labels turn you off, you can easily make similar varieties right at home, and your creations will be cheaper and healthier as well.

Making yogurt isn't difficult; in fact, it's one of the easiest ways to make your milk last longer. Best of all, this versatile, tangy topping works well in sweet and savory dishes alike, meaning you can mix some into your soups and stir-fries as naturally as you pour it on pancakes or blend some into your morning smoothie.

To make homemade yogurt, all you need is a half-gallon of milk, kitchen thermometer, and yogurt starter culture to inoculate the milk with yogurt-forming bacteria. Once you get into the routine of making your own, you can use a scoop of the previous yogurt to start the next batch.

Begin by heating milk to between 185 to 190 degrees F, constantly stirring to ensure it won't burn to the bottom of the pan. Once you reach the temperature, pull the pot off the stove and stir it until it cools to 120 degrees F, which usually takes fifteen minutes. Next, spoon in your starter culture and whisk until thoroughly blended into the milk. Pour all the milk into a glass jar with a lid (mason jars work well) and allow the mixture to 'ripen' at about 110 degrees F for 4 to 8 hours. There are yogurt makers specifically suited to this task, but otherwise you can use the warming setting on your oven.

After several hours, your yogurt will have thickened. You can eat it as is, strain out the some of the excess whey to make a thicker, Greek-style yogurt, or add your favorite toppings to create unique flavors. Don't limit yourself to boring berries: applesauce, cinnamon, maple syrup, and even shredded carrots all add unexpected flavors and a hint of sweetness to homemade yogurt.

Remember: Don't Be Afraid to Experiment

Despite the hundreds of recipes available, processed dairy products have a secret: the joy of making them comes from experimentation and innovation. Think of instructions as a starting

point for your homesteading inspiration, and you'll soon fill your fridge with tasty, nutritious and unique homemade cheese, yogurt and butter.