

Queso Fresco: The Gateway Cheese

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Recipe:

Equipment needed:

Curd knife
Large Tomme mold with follower
Cheese press (optional)

Ingredients:

2 gallons whole milk
1 tsp liquid calcium chloride diluted in 2 Tbsp water (optional)
1 packet direct set mesophilic culture
1/8 – 1/4 tsp lipase dissolved in 1/4 cup water (optional; will give a tangier flavor)
1/4 tablet rennet or 1/4 tsp liquid rennet dissolved in 1/4 cup water
2 Tbsp Cheese salt or other noniodized salt

Add the calcium chloride to the milk in a large stock pot and heat to 90°F. Add the culture and the lipase and mix thoroughly. Let ripen for 30 minutes, then add rennet. Mix in rennet gently but evenly, then stop movement in milk so that curds will set properly. Allow curds to set for 45 minutes or until clean break is achieved.

Cut curds into 1/4” cubes with curd knife. Let curds rest without stirring for 5 minutes. Turn heat on low or put pot in sink to use as a water bath and slowly raise the temperature to 95°F over 20 minutes. Stir the curds gently during this time, cutting any curds that were missed so all curds are similar sizes. After 20 minutes of heating, let the curds rest without stirring or additional heat for 5 minutes.

Drain off whey and reserve for making ricotta. Add salt to curds and mix in with hands. Hold curds at 95°F for 30 minutes longer.

Line large Tomme mold with coarse cheesecloth. Pack curds into the mold and press with 35 pounds for 6 hours. Remove cheese from mold and cheesecloth and store in fridge for up to 2 weeks. Flavor will develop over the next several days, but it is ready to eat right away!

Variations:

- Cut queso fresco into bite-sized cubes and marinade in olive oil with paprika, oregano, cayenne, garlic, and thyme to serve as an appetizer
- Brine the finished cheese overnight to make a cotija-style cheese
- Mix chopped blanched peppers (hot or mild) into curds before pressing to make a pepper cheese



From these basic steps you can move on to the “harder” cheeses!