

Feta Cheese

by Chef Brian Henry

Feta Cheese is one of the most popular Greek cheeses. This brined curd cheese has a protected designation of origin in the European Union. It is defined by being made from 70% sheep's milk and 30% goat's milk that is produced only in Greece. Outside of the European Union feta cheese is often made from cow's milk or any combination of it with sheep's and goat's milk.

Apart from the choices of milks used in the production of feta, the process for creating this cheese is practically the same and has been practiced for over 6000 years. The curd is formed into large blocks. The blocks are given a generous salting. The blocks are then cut into smaller blocks and salted again. They are then packaged into containers with the whey that the curds were originally separated from and allowed to age for up to several months. After the aging process the cheese is ready to use. It can range from soft to semi-hard in texture and has a distinct tanginess with a salty and somewhat acidic bite on the palate. It commonly has a milk fat content of 45% and a pH of 4.7.

The Vandenburg family operates Mariposa Dairy in Oakwood located in the City of Kawartha Lakes. This award winning dairy produces a variety of cheeses made from goat's milk and is available for purchase at Strano's Mediterranean Market in Peterborough.

Feta cheese is a must for such dishes as Greek salad and Spanokopita. I like to crumble some feta on my pizzas and pasta dishes as well.

Homemade Feta Cheese:

4 litres of milk (preferably high fat like homogenized)
1 cup 35% whipping cream
3 tbsp plain high fat yoghurt
1 rennet tablet
One-quarter cup cold water
Salt

Combine the milk and cream together in a saucepan and gently heat it to 95 F be careful not scald it. Turn off the burner and stir the yogurt into the milk mixture. Let it stand for 1 hour. Dissolve rennet tablet in 1/4 cup cold water and stir it into the milk. Cover and let it stand at room temperature overnight. In the morning, pour off the water which has risen to the surface. Cut the remaining semi-solid mass (curd) into 1 inch cubes. Lightly salt the curds. Wrap the curds in cheesecloth, and place it into a colander to hang over a pot for two hours to allow more of the whey to drain from the curds. After the two hours place a plate in the colander on top of the curds in the cheese cloth and place a couple of pounds of weight on top of the plate to create a press. Let stand for 6 more hours. Remove the cheese from the cheesecloth and season it with salt to taste. Store cheese in a sealed container for up to 2 days. This recipe will yield approximately one cup of feta cheese.



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