Bob's Cheese(s)
Cottage, Farmer's, Pot, Hoop, Ricotta

These recipes are for: cottage cheese, farmer's – pot – hoop cheese, and/or ricotta cheese. First let's look at what we are talking about and what the differences are. To make cottage cheese some recipe's call for rennet, but I will use citric acid instead. Rennet cheese is less acidic and generally larger chunks; alternately, using citric acid adds more acidity. These cheeses are not quite what might be called cream cheese, but they can be used in place of cream cheese. Or, you can use a different recipe and actually make cream cheese, but that's not my intent here.

So follow the below recipe to make cottage cheese. The curds are then washed to remove the last bit of whey and acidity. It is not pressed. You then add a little bit of milk or cream to make it creamy cottage cheese.

To make what is known as pot cheese, farmer's cheese or the older name hoop cheese you make the cottage cheese but do not rinse it. You then press the cheese to make it a bit harder and press out the excessive whey.

Ricotta cheese is basically the same process as cottage cheese except rather than using milk to begin with, you use the whey from some other cheese making process to get the very last of the 'cheese' out of the whey. This means you don't actually get much cheese out of a lot of liquid.

There are lots of other types of cheeses that can be made, but this recipe is just for the above. Many of the other cheese recipes begin this way, but then process them and age them much differently.

These are all fresh cheeses and need to be refrigerated. Also, they generally last for a week or two as they are not aged cheeses. So make them fresh and use them fresh.

So, here are the steps to make first cottage cheese and then farmer's (pot or hoop) cheese and ricotta.

Ingredients
   1 gallon cow's milk (I prefer whole milk rather than 2% or non-fat) You can use goat's milk or any other kind of milk for a different flavor.
   ½ cup chlorine free water
   2 teaspoons salt
   1+ teaspoon citric acid

You will also need the following:
   Cooking thermometer (digital works best or regular, not a candy thermometer)
   Fine cheese cloth
   Sieve or colander
   Non-reactive pot to cook the milk to cheese with a lid (I also use an insulating pad the help distribute the gas burner heat so as to not burn the milk in hot spots. I know, mine is asbestos & copper wire, but there are other fiberglass or metal ones available today.) Non-reactive is because the acid will attack the pan. Non-reactive includes: stainless steel, ceramic, or ceramic coated type pots. Do not use cast-iron, aluminum, copper and the like.
   If you wish to keep the whey you will also need a heat resistant large bowl

Procedure

Put the water in a small bowl and add the citric acid. Recipes call for about 1 teaspoon, but I find that it is not quite enough to precipitate out all the cheese from the whey, so I add maybe ½ teaspoon extra. Mix to dissolve most of the acid.

Add the milk to the non reactive pot, place it over the insulating pad on the gas fire and turn the burner to medium. Then add the salt and acid/water to the milk and mix well. After the first mix, you will not mix vigorously again. Cover the pot to help hold in the heat.

Allow the milk to slowly come to 180° to 185°. Every so often check that the milk is not burning on the bottom of the pot by using a slotted spoon, but try not to stir much. If you find it burning, turn down the heat and continue. Check every 5 or so minutes especially at the beginning. It may take over an hour to come to temperature depending upon the heat level. Do not allow the mixture to boil over.

When it comes to temperature (or before) you should be able to see the curds separating from the whey. The curds will be white clumps and the whey will be a yellowish liquid around the curds. If you still have a milky white liquid between the curds and you are at temperture, you may need to add a little more citric acid. Once you are happy with the amount of curds and the yellowishness of the whey, turn off the heat and let the pot sit undisturbed for 10 to 15 minutes.

Place the cheese cloth in the sieve in the sink if you are not saving the whey or in the bowl if you are. Carefully pour the curds and whey into the cheese cloth until it is empty. The whey will drain away and the curds will stay in the cheese cloth. Let it drain for a while. You can pickup and rock the cheese cloth to help eliminate the whey.

Now here is where the process changes:

Cottage cheese: Rinse the curds with clean cool water a couple of times and let them drain. You can hand squeeze the cheese cloth a little to help, but not too much. Once drained put the curds in a bowl and add an amount of milk or cream to add the creaminess you like and refrigerate. Use as you normally do for cottage cheese.

Ricotta cheese: Let the curds drain completely. Do not rinse them. You may hand squeeze a little to help the draining. This cheese can be used for salad toppings, bagels, pizza, or many other uses and recipes where you like a bit of tang (acid).

Farmer's (pot or hoop) cheese: Let the curds drain. Tie a knot in the top of the cheese cloth to seal the cheese in the cheese cloth. Place a small cutting board in a baking pan (to catch the excess whey), then place the cheese on top of that. Place another cutting board above that then place a large heavy pot on top of that. You may fill the pot to make it heavier if you like. You may have to balance this whole mess against the wall so it doesn't fall over. The idea is to put pressure on the cheese so more of the whey will be pressed out. (If you have one, obviously you can use a cheese press, but I don't so I came up with this method.) Let the cheese press for several hours until pretty dry then refrigerate. This cheese is ready for recipes that call for farmer's cheese. It can also be used for cracker toppings, bagels, pizza, salads, etc. This is a great cheese to use for home made cheese cake (see other recipe).

One gallon of whole milk will make about 1 to 1 ¼ pounds of cheese.

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