

Manchego Cheese

By Bob Peak

In Spain, where Manchego originated, various milk combinations are used in its production. Some creameries use sheep's milk alone, while others add cow's milk or goat's milk to a sheep's milk blend. Here in Sonoma County, commercial sheep's milk is very scarce (I've never seen it for sale—let me know if you have!). To compensate for the otherwise milder flavor of cow's milk, I make my Sonoma County Manchego with the addition of Lipase enzyme. That enzyme, available in powder form at The Beverage People, introduces a stronger, more robust flavor and aroma to cow's milk cheese (making it more like sheep's milk cheese).

Top 5 reasons why I like to make Manchego:

5. I like to eat Manchego, and my homemade cheese is as delicious as any I've ever tasted.
4. Among the hard cheeses, Manchego provides "quick" gratification by aging "only" 30 days in the cellar.
3. It's fun to say "mahn-CHAY-go".
2. It is great as both a snacking cheese and a cooking cheese.
1. Instead of waxing it, you can olive-oil the rind for aging. So, making it here, you can use locally-grown olive oil on your locally-made cheese! (I use Saint Gregory of Sinai Monastery Lake County estate olive oil—I highly recommend it!)

This recipe makes a small wheel, about 12 ounces when complete. Double everything for a larger, 1 1/2-pound wheel.

Ingredients

1 gallon whole cow's milk
1/4 tsp. Mesophilic II culture, dissolved in 1/4 cup water
1/4 tsp. Thermophilic B culture, dissolved with the Meso II
1/2 tsp. Calcium Chloride solution in 1/4 c. water
1/4 tsp. Lipase powder. Dissolve in 1/4 c. water and let stand 20 minutes.
1/4 tsp. liquid rennet in 1/4 c. water.
Salt for brine
Cold water for brine
Olive oil

Equipment

Kettle with water bath
Perforated Ladle
Curd cutting knife
Stainless steel whisk

Cheese press with basket
Nylon cheese netting or Cheesecloth
Glass or stainless steel bowl for brine

1. Warm milk to 86 deg. F.
2. Add the calcium chloride, stir.
3. Add Meso II and Thermo B cultures, stirring gently. Cover the pot and hold at 86 deg. F for 45 minutes.
4. Add the lipase and the rennet. Stir gently for one minute. Cover and let set for 30 minutes at 86 deg. F.
5. When curd shows a clean break, cut into 1/2" cubes.
6. Cut the curds into rice-size pieces by stirring with a stainless steel whisk for 30 minutes.
7. Heat the curds to 104 deg. F at a rate of two degrees every five minutes. This will take 45 minutes all together. Stir gently with the ladle while heating to keep curds from matting.
8. Let the curds settle for 5 minutes and pour off excess whey.
9. Moisten a piece of nylon netting or cheesecloth large enough to double-line your press basket. Wring it out and double-line the basket.
10. Ladle the curd into the basket. Fold netting in on top and press at light pressure (about 15 lbs.) for 15 minutes.
11. Remove the cheese from the press, unwrap, rewrap, and place upside-down back in the basket.
12. Press lightly again for 15 minutes.
13. Repeat rewrapping and pressing for 15 minutes.
14. Rewrap and press moderately hard (30 lbs.) for 6 hours.
15. Make a saturated brine large enough to hold your cheese. Keep adding salt to water until no more will dissolve—about 1 lb. For every half gallon of water.
16. Unwrap the cheese and float it in the brine for 6 hours at 55 deg. F. Turn over two or three times during the six hours.
17. Remove the cheese from the brine and pat dry with paper towels or clean cheesecloth.
18. Place on aging mat. Age at 55 deg. F. Turn once per day.
19. After a week or so, when the surface is dry, rub it with olive oil. (If mold spots appear, scrub them off with a vegetable brush dipped in white vinegar and salt.)
20. After 30 days or more, you may eat the cheese. To save some of it, cut into quarters, oil them individually, and wrap in cheese paper. Refrigerate.
21. Disfrute su queso! (Enjoy your cheese!)