



THE BEVERAGE PEOPLE

Blue Cheese

Around the world, there are famous blue cheeses. The Roquefort of France is a sheep's milk cheese. The Cabrales of Spain can be made from cow's milk alone, or may have goat's milk or sheep's milk blended in. England's Stilton is a cow's milk cheese legally restricted to production in just three counties. Italian Gorgonzola, from cow's milk and/or goat's milk, is named for a small town near Milan. As early as AD 79, Pliny the Elder remarked upon the rich flavor of blue cheese.

All of these are pungent, spicy, white to light yellow cheeses containing blue, green, or gray veins from introduced mold cultures. The mold most commonly used for production of blue cheeses is *Penicillium roqueforti* and that is the culture we have chosen for our recipe as well. The veins are induced by piercing the cheeses with a knitting needle. The mold follows the channels created because it needs air to grow. Careful attention to aging conditions will produce a creamy and flavorful cheese with good melting qualities. Try a slice on a grilled steak, or make a blue cheese cream sauce for pasta!

Yields 3 6-8 ounce cheeses.

Ingredients

- 1 gallon whole cow's milk (not ultrapasteurized)
- 1 cup (1/2 pint) heavy whipping cream (not ultrapasteurized)
- 1/16 tsp. *Penicillium roqueforti* culture powder
- 1/8 tsp. MA 4001 "Farmhouse" direct-set mesophilic culture
- 1/4 tsp. calcium chloride solution, dissolved in 1/4 cup water
- 1/4 tsp. liquid rennet, dissolved in 1/4 cup water
- 1 Tbsp. Kosher salt or flaked cheese salt (plus more for sprinkling)

Equipment

Production:

- 6-10 quart pot in a water bath (double boiler)
- Dial Top Thermometer (a second thermometer is helpful, for monitoring the water bath)
- Stainless steel slotted spoon or perforated ladle
- Measuring spoons
- 2 custard cups or small ramekins
- Colander and a bowl it fits in
- 1/2 yard cheesecloth for cheese
- 2 cheeseboards, plastic or covered with plastic wrap

Forming and aging:

- 4 Soft cheese molds, perforated plastic about 3.9" dia. at the top x 3.6" dia. at the bottom x 3" high (the fourth mold is for turning the cheeses – the recipe makes 3)
- Draining tray and mat
- #4 (3.5 mm) Aluminum knitting needle
- Ripening box

Method

1. Mix milk and cream in double boiler, sprinkle on *Penicillium roqueforti* and stir.
2. Warm to 86° F, stirring gently. Sprinkle on and stir in MA 4001 culture. Cover and hold at 86° F for 30 minutes.
3. Add calcium chloride and stir, then rennet and stir with 20 top-bottom strokes. Cover and hold at 86° F for 90 minutes.
4. Line colander with doubled sterilized cheesecloth (an 18" square, two layers of cloth). Place colander completely in a deep bowl.
5. Using a slotted spoon or ladle, transfer curd to lined colander. This may take a few minutes as whey runs out into the bowl and curd settles in the colander. The curd should be resting in whey.
6. Place the bowl and colander back into the 86° F water bath (if your bowl and colander will not fit in your pot, run two or three inches of water at 88-90° F into your kitchen sink and set the bowl in that). Cover and hold for 90 minutes.
7. Tie corners of cheesecloth together and hang curd ball over a deep pot. (You can empty your water bath pot and use it for this, placing a wooden spoon across the top to hang the ball from.) Drain 30 minutes.
8. Place curd, still in cloth, between plastic or plastic-covered cheeseboards. Arrange to drain into sink by placing a wooden spoon under one end. Weight with 5 pounds (a couple of cookbooks will work). Press overnight at room temperature.
9. Sanitize 4 soft cheese molds (the extra one is for turning).
10. Remove the curd from the cheesecloth. In a bowl, break into ½" pieces. Gently blend in 1 Tbsp. salt with your fingers.
11. Gently pack curd into three molds. Use the bottom of the fourth mold to gently compact the three cheeses. Rest on draining tray in ripening box. Cover loosely with wax paper.
12. After 20 minutes, turn one cheese in to the spare mold, flipping the cake of cheese. Using that mold, do the next, and so on. Flip every 20 minutes for two hours. Press gently into mold with each turning.
13. At the end of two hours, turn the cheeses out onto a draining mat on the draining tray in the ripening box. Let stand, loosely covered, overnight.
14. Turn the cheeses 3 times a day for the next three or four days at room temperature, loosely covered. You will know this step is complete when a light, downy bloom of blue-green appears on the cheeses.
15. Sanitize the knitting needle. Pierce each cheese 15 times, turn over, and pierce 15 more times.
16. Place the cheeses in the ripening box in a location with 90% humidity at 55° F.
17. Turn the cheeses once a day for 3 days. Sprinkle both sides with kosher salt at the end of three days.
18. Reduce humidity to 85%, maintaining 55° F. Age up to 30 days, turning twice a week.
19. When flavor and mold development are satisfactory, wrap and refrigerate finished cheeses (or eat them!).