THE BEVERAGE PEOPLE

Cheddar Cheese

Many of us consider cheddar the Holy-Grail of cheese. It has all the components of what we think of as “cheese”. Sharp yet clean tasting, firm textured, easy to melt, easy to grate, and the aged versions are perfect with crackers.
Downside: waiting for the results.

Ingredients

2 gallons whole Cow’s Milk
1/4 tsp. Meso II culture
1/2 tsp. Calcium Chloride in 1/8 cup water
1 tsp. Rennet in 1/8 cup water
1/8 tsp. Annatto (optional orange color)
2 T Kosher Salt

Equipment

Stainless Steel Pot, 10-12 qts.
Oversize Pot for double boiler
Perforated ladle or slotted spoon
Thermometer
Colander
Nylon netting or cheese cloth
Press

Method

1. Bring milk to 86-88 F. in water bath. Stir in the Meso II culture, using 20 top/bottom strokes.Cover and leave for 45 minutes to ripen.
2. Stir in optional annatto, add Calcium Chloride and stir again. Add rennet and stir 20 strokes, cover, and let stand, at 86° F. for 40 minutes.
3. Check for a “clean break”, then proceed to cut the curd into 1/2 inch cubes. Let the curds rest for 5 minutes. Slowly bring the curd to 102° F. stirring to reduce the curd to the size of half a peanut. This takes about 30 minutes.
4. Hold the curds at 102° F. for 30 minutes. Stir every couple minutes to prevent matting. Give the curd a “texture test”. Ball up a spoon of curds in your fist, they should lump together, then push them apart with your thumb and if they separate, you are ready to proceed. If they do not mat together or if they do not separate, continue to cook untill they do or take a pH reading. The whey should be pH 6.1- 6.3 at this point.
5. Let the curd settle for 15 minutes, then drain into a colander. Rest colander over the warm whey you have saved in the kettle. The whey should remain at 98-100° F for 60 minutes while you continue to flip the curd every 15-20 minutes. The curd will stay warm throughout and will continue to expel the whey evenly. This “cheddaring” process gives the cheese the characteristic “squeak” of aged cheddar.
6. Remove the slab to a cutting board, and cut it up into the shape of medium sized French Fries. Place curds into a bowl.
7. Add 1 T. of coarse salt and mix with your hands to distribute the salt. Wait 5 minutes and distribute again 1 T.
8. Place cheese cloth or nylon netting into the bottom of the press and add the curds, covering them over the top with the extra material. Place the follower on top and bring down the screw until you feel moderate pressure. Let the whey drain for 15 minutes.
9. Reposition the wheel of cheese upside down and retighten the press screw for 12 hours. Then tighten the press screw until you are at a firm pressure.
10. Flip once more and tighten press for aditional 24 hours.
11. Take the wheel out of the press, remove the material, and store at room temperature for 2-3 days to develop a dry rind. Flip the cheese daily to ensure even drying. Your wheel will be ready to wax after the exterior is firm and the color is a light butter-yellow. If you see any mold on the surface scrub with salt water and wax sooner than later.
12. Apply soft wax 1-2 times letting the cheese dry inbetween coatings and/or follow with hard wax. Store cheese at cellar temperature of 50-55° F and 75% humidity. If you only use soft wax on the cheese store at a higher humidity 85-90% .
13. Allow 3-4 months for a mild Cheddar flavor to develop, or longer for stronger aged cheddar flavor.