



Cheese making recipe: ricotta

Cheese making recipe: at home using whole or skim milk from the supermarket. No special cultures or equipment needed.

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Ricotta cheese is a tasty ingredient that can be used to enhance quick [meals](#) and is integral to many gourmet dishes. The stuff they sell in the supermarket is ricotta only in that it is not cottage cheese. However, it is expensive and seldom on hand when you really need it. Excellent ricotta cheese can be made on short notice using a sauce pan, colander, [supermarket](#) milk, and some fine muslin.

Genuine ricotta cheese is a by-product of the production of Parmesan and Romano [cheese](#). It is made from the whey, a cloudy, watery substance that weeps out as the curd is cut and allowed to sit. The whey contains most of the protein from the milk and is a valuable food, often fed to pigs (think of Parma hams) and chickens or used to enrich soups and stews.

However, primary use of whey is in the production of ricotta cheese (ricotta means "re-cooked"). When making cheese at home it is usual to save the whey for making ricotta. Alas, the yield is usually scant, less than a cup of cheese from the whey left after making a cheese from 2 gallons of milk. Most books suggest adding additional milk to increase the yield, which works well. However, it is just as easy to make ricotta from all [milk](#) and no whey. This way, you can make it whenever you want and not have to spend a day making other cheese.

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Ricotta Cheese

1 gallon whole milk or skim (1 gal. whole milk = about 1lb cheese)

white vinegar or fresh lemon juice

a large colander lined with fine cheesecloth. butter muslin is preferred, or some other substitute, a ham bag or jelly bag will work just fine.

Put the milk in a large, non-reactive sauce [pan](#) and heat slowly to 200 degrees, stirring to prevent it scorching on the bottom. When the milk is hot enough, add about 1/4 [cup](#) of vinegar or lemon juice. If the milk is really at 200 degrees, it will instantly curdle, the milk protein and fat separating from the water in smallish white blobs and foam. If this does not happen, keep heating. Use a thermometer, dairy or candy works fine, but some of them are not quite accurate. If you put the vinegar in when the milk is close to the correct temperature, as soon as it reacts, you know it is done. It is not necessary to continue heating once the reaction occurs, however, you will want to let it sit for a few minutes, with an occasional stir.

Place your lined colander in the sink, drain open please, and carefully pour the entire contents (DO NOT skim anything off) of the [pot](#) into it. Take your time, and allow the water to drain through the cheesecloth. It will go pretty quickly if you have used butter muslin. If it goes too quickly and nothing is left behind, you will know that your cheesecloth is too coarse and your cheese has gone down the drain! Do not despair, this has happened to many experienced cheese makers, just get finer cheesecloth and try again.

Assuming that all goes well, allow the ricotta to drain and cool until you can handle the cheesecloth comfortably. Gather the ends of the cloth up and tie into a bag which must be suspended over the sink until it stops dripping. You can hang it on the faucet or drape it from a [wooden spoon](#) laid across the sink, whatever works. The ricotta will be finished draining in about an hour and be ready to use in any recipe that calls for this type of cheese. You can add a bit of salt if you like. Of, if the cheese is to be used in a desert, add a little cream and mix in well to make a richer product.

If you are not going to use the cheese immediately, pack into a container and either refrigerate or freeze. This cheese freezes well and will always be available that way. It keeps in the fridge a few days.

One way to use milk that is starting to go over is to make ricotta from it. If you don't have a full gallon, just reduce the vinegar a bit - this is not critical, however, too much won't hurt. The only real difference is that you will get less cheese from less milk. Any cheese at all is better than pouring milk down the drain.



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