

Cheese 101

What is Cheese?



The origin of cheesemaking dates back thousands of years, and today cheese is available in more than 100 different varieties. Flavours and textures vary depending on starter cultures and ripening times but are all based around the same traditional process.

Whether it be cheese slices in a toasted sandwich, or crumbled over a bowl of pasta, cheese has a huge number of applications and appeals to people around the world in many different ways.

There are six main types of natural cheese.

1. Cheddar and Cheddar types, including processed cheese

These firm-textured, all-purpose yellow cheeses vary in flavour from mild to strong. The category includes Colby, Vintage, Egmont and processed cheese.

2. Hard grating cheese

Cheeses like Parmesan and Romano are very firm-textured with a strong flavour and aroma. They're cured for up to two years to develop their distinctive taste.

3. Stretched curd

Soft, moist, low-fat cheeses like Mozzarella are used for their stretch, especially on pizzas.

4. Fresh cheese

Fresh cheeses with a mild flavour like Cream Cheese, Cottage Cheese and Ricotta are ready to consume immediately. They have a short shelf life due to their high moisture content.

5. Round Eye or Swiss style

Elsberg, Emmentaler, Gruyere and other Swiss-style cheese have a distinctive 'nutty' flavour and 'eyes' or holes. Both the starter culture and the maturing process are different from those used for Cheddar.

6. Specialty cheese

Fresh, short shelf life cheese matures quickly. Mould-ripened cheese include white mould cheeses like Camembert and Brie, as well as blue mould cheese that has a piquant flavour.

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Cheese 101

How is Cheese made?



Cheese begins life as curdled milk – the curds and whey of the nursery rhyme. The white curds are used to make cheese while the watery whey is processed into other dairy products including Ricotta.

Cheese makers begin with fresh milk, and control the curdling process by adding rennet and a natural bacterial culture known as a starter. The milk then coagulates into a single curd.

The curd is cut, stirred and heated to ensure that all of the whey has drained away. It is salted, flavoured, moulded and shaped, then ripened under carefully controlled conditions according to the type of cheese being made.

Mozzarella is produced after curd is cooked and stretched prior to forming a block. The block is matured until it reaches its optimum functionality.

Cream Cheese is made from milk with a high fat content which is then doubled by the addition of cream. A setting period of 16 hours gives the cheese time to develop its rich, creamy flavours.

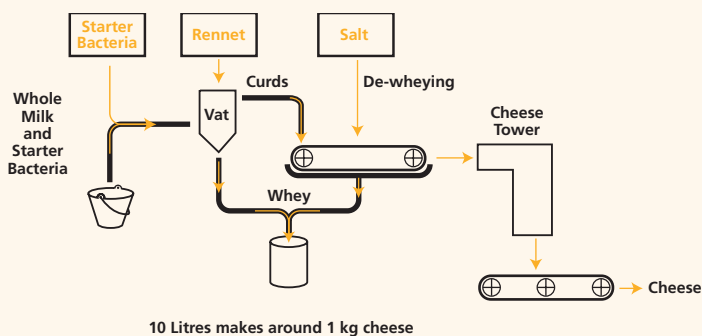
Processed Cheese is made from natural, matured cheese, melted and blended with milk solids, emulsifiers, salt and preservatives. The process prevents further maturation and makes the cheese more stable at high temperature.

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The Process



Making Cheese

1. Depending on the cheese being made, cream or skim milk may be added to fresh milk before it is pasteurised. Rennet and a starter are added, causing it to curdle.
2. The curds and whey are heated and stirred until the starter has created enough lactic acid to give the cheese the correct flavour.
3. The whey is strained away through screens.
4. The curds are transferred to a belt where they continue to drain, eventually forming a solid mat of cheese.
5. The cheese is cut into small pieces.
6. Salt is added to dry salt cheese.
7. The pieces are pumped to the top of a tower where they form a block under their own weight.
8. Dry salt cheese is packed.
9. Brine salt cheeses are immersed in tanks of brine before being packed.
10. Cheese is then packed and stacked onto a pallet.

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