

How Green is your cheese?

Testing recipes using different kind of cheeses.

An Experiment by Lady Hrosvitha von Celle
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When redacting recipes one of the more challenging aspects is ingredient selection
To illustrate the differences, I have chosen to make one recipe using 2 different cheeses.

RECIPE:

Torta Sambucea (elderflower & ricotta cheese pie)

<http://www.godecookery.com/friends/frec73.htm>

Original recipes from *De honesta voluptate (Plantina)*: Elderberry Pie. Mix with elder flowers all the things which we have noted for white pie. The latter mixture ought to be, however, thicker than the former, because the flowers are distributed throughout. Although this dish is of little nourishment and is digested slowly, nevertheless it makes those eating it frequently happier. Let Caelius eat this, who surpasses Saturn in melancholy. (Milham, 367)

White Pie. Pound well a pound and a half of the **best fresh cheese**, cut up especially fine. When it is pounded, mix in twelve to fifteen egg whites, a half pound of sugar, a half ounce of white ginger, a half pound of pork fat, the same of fresh butter, and as much milk as will be enough. When you have spread a thin pastry crust in an earthenware pot, put in all these things. When it has been placed on the hearth, cook on a slow fire. Put coals on the top of the lid so that it will become more colored. When it is cooked and taken from this pot, sprinkle ground sugar with rose water on it. This is very nourishing, is digested slowly, warms the liver, but it causes blockages, generates stone, and is bad for eyes and nerves. (Milham, 363)

Modern recipe: Elder Flower White Pie (1/2 of above recipe). Makes 2 pies

. 2 deep-dish pie crusts, pre-baked	i. ½ pound butter
) 1 pound fresh cheese	. ½ cup milk (or less)
. 7 egg whites, very lightly beaten	. 1 tablespoon elder flowers dried
. 2/3 cup sugar	. 2 tsp sugar, for sprinkling
. 1/3 ounce fresh ginger root, peeled and minced fine or grated	. rosewater, for sprinkling: OPTIONAL

Preheat oven to 325°F. Soften the butter at room temperature (do not melt). Place the cheese in a mixing bowl & add the softened butter and lard, mixing well. Add the ginger and mix well. Add the egg whites, mixing as little as possible and only until thoroughly combined. Add the sugar and mix well. Add the milk, checking to see that the consistency does not get soupy. Use less milk to maintain a batter-like appearance. Fold in the flowers until just combined.

Add the mixture to a pre-baked pie shell and bake for 40-60 minutes. When the oil from the pie separates on the top, remove it from the oven and sprinkle it with the extra sugar and optionally with a few drops of rosewater. Place the pie briefly under the broiler and brown the sugar on the top lightly. Cool the pies to room temperature before cutting. The pie will set as it cools.

Notes: **Lard was replaced with butter.

So the question that must be answered is WHAT IS FRESH CHEESE????? Fresh cheese is “un-aged” cheese. It has a short shelf life and usually must be kept refrigerated or cool. It is made daily for immediate consumption. There is evidence of 2 main types of cheese: rennet cheese & “acid” cheese. Modern equivalents would be cottage cheese and ricotta. In period there was also “Pot cheese” – named as such since it required sitting in a pot at room temperature for 8 hours. There are a few recipes for fresh cheese in period cookbooks. I have chosen to focus on Pot cheese & ricotta for this comparison:

Pot cheese/ Farmer's Cheese:

Pleyn Delit refers to a soft curd cheese that needs to be drained from its whey in Recipe #117:
#117: Sambocade - Take & make a Curst in a trap & take cruddes and wryng out the wheyse, and drawe them turch a strynor, and put in the strynor crusts...

Curye on Inglysch has the same recipe (#179)
#179: Sambocade. Take and make a crust in a trap & take cruddes and wryng out the wheyze and drawe hem trugh a straynour and put hit in the crust....

But both of the above recipes say nothing about how to produce the curds.

Curye on Inglysch #23 (V)

Chinche. Tak fayr mylk. Put it thoru a streynour into a panne. Warme it; cast therto a lytyl rennyng, & than take it off the feer and stere it togydir & couere it. than tak a resche the lengthe of half a plater, & aboute this resche broyde other resches crosswyse as thiche as thou may. Thanne lay thes broyden resches on a plater. Cast aboute the crudde, & pore out the qwhey; Than trune it upsodoun on another plater. Cast aboute suger & gynger & seue forth.

Chinche. Take good milk. Put it through a strainer into a pan. Warm it. **Add a little rennet** and take it off the fire and stir it together and cover it. Then take a rush the length of half a platter and around this rush bind other rushes crosswise as thick as you may.

Then lay these bound rushes on a platter. Cast about the curd and pour out the whey; then turn it upside down on another platter. Add sugar & ginger & so forth. (155)¹

Most redactions have these as being cottage-like cheeses. This kind of cheese is good for cooking on a daily basis. It can be pressed for a firmer cheese or left with more whey (cottage). It is NOT ricotta like. That would require the use of vinegar, not rennet.

PROCEDURE:

1 gallon whole milk (4%)
1 pt heavy cream (40%)
1 cup meso starter (or cultured buttermilk)
1/4 tablet Rennet (or two drops of liquid rennet)

1. Warm milk to room temperature (68-70°F)
2. Dissolve 1/4 of a rennet tablet in 1/4 cup luke warm water.
3. Stir in culture, mix thoroughly.
4. Stir in rennet, mix thoroughly, cover, let sit for 8 hours.
5. Cut into 1/2" cubes. Let set for 15 min
6. Warm curds to 80 degrees over 15 min.
7. Warm curds to 90 degrees over 20 min.
8. Warm curds to 110 degrees over 20 minutes.
9. Hold at 110 degrees for 20 min or until curds no longer have a custard-like interior.
10. Let curds settle. Pour off whey (hold for ricotta).
11. Ladle the curds into a sterile cloth in a strainer (or colander),
12. Let the whey drain for several minutes.
13. Salt to taste (about 1-2 teaspoons), store covered in the refrigerator for a week or two.
Curd may used as such (Pot cheese) or pressed under weight to remove more of the whey (Farmer's cheese)

¹ Hieatt, Constance B. & Sharon Butler. Curye on Inglysch. Book V:Goud Kokery. Pg 155. 1985. Early English Text Society. Oxford Univeristy Press, New York.
#23 from a 15th c manuscript, Bodl. MS C. C. C. F 291.

Fresh Ricotta/Whey cheese:

From the Latin, *recoctus*, meaning to be re-cooked. Must be produced with fresh whey (less than 2 hours old). Cheese produced from cooking the whey left over from cheesemaking to 200° F and vinegar is added to precipitate the curd. Some have the curd being lifted off the top as it rises, others allow the curd to settle to the bottom of the whey and, after the whey cools, strain the cheese out. Yield is higher for whey from lower temperature cheese (see tasting examples). (Rubino, 423). It is important to note that ricotta must be made with FRESH whey. After 2 hours, the proteins no longer separate out from the whey.

From Plantina: On Right Pleasure, Book II (c. 1474 AD)

18. On Ricotta Cheese

When the cheese is **taken from the bronze kettle**, we heat the whey for some time on a slow fire until the fat which is the residue of the cheese rises to the top. Farmers call this ricotta because it is gathered from the milk in a second heating. It is white and not unpleasant to taste. Less healthful than fresh or medium-aged cheese, it is considered better than aged or over-salty. It can be called either *cocta* [cooked] or *ricotta* [recooked]. Cooks mix it into many vegetable ragouts.

PROCEDURE:

Whey from Farmer's cheese making + whole milk to make 1 gallon

¼ c vinegar

- Bring fresh whey to 200°F.
- Add a small amount of vinegar until flakes of curds become visible.
- Strain off the curd as it rises to the top and place in a buttercloth. Allow to drain.
- Refrigerate and use within a week.²

The recipe was split into 2 pies. 7 egg whites measures 1 cup. ½ lb (1 cup) of each cheese was used.

Variances:

While mixing, the pot cheese was much smoother and creamier. It required very little milk to bring to "batter" consistency. The ricotta mixture used almost the entire remaining milk to bring to the same consistency. The ricotta pie is fuller due to the additional milk needed and, I believe, the difference in the curd. The ricotta curds separated immediately when mixing. The pot cheese did not – it has more of a thick sour cream feel to it.

Yield: 1 gallon of milk yielded nearly 6lbs of cheese. I only yielded about 1 lb from 1/3 gallon (plus the whey) for the Ricotta. It was enough for the recipe, but there was no extra.

After baking the taste & texture continue to be very different. I feel both would be acceptable in terms of accuracy, with the final selection coming down to taste for the cook. As with many other dishes when it comes to cooking, changing one ingredient can change the dish.

Which do you like better?

² (Carroll, 89)

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Pot Cheese

Pie with Pot Cheese

Pie with Ricotta