Cheesemaking Basics

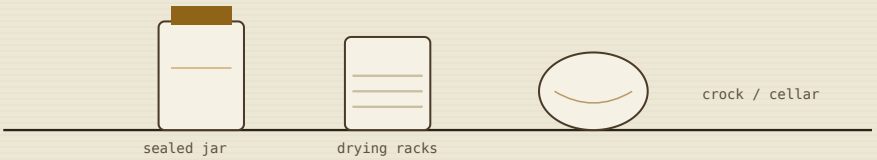
Turn fresh milk into simple cheeses at home

DIFFICULTY Moderate
TYPE Seasonal batch technique
TIME A few hours for soft cheese, months for aged

DIFFICULTY	TIME	COST	BEST SEASON	FREQUENCY
Moderate	Hours–months	Low–moderate	Whenever milk is available	Regular batches through lactation

01 Curds and whey, then technique diverges

Every cheese starts the same way — separating curds from whey using heat, acid, or rennet — but what happens after (draining, pressing, ageing) is what determines whether you end up with a soft fresh cheese or a hard aged one.



02 What you'll need

- Fresh milk (cow, goat, or sheep)
- Rennet and/or a culture or acid (lemon juice/vinegar for simple fresh cheeses)
- A dairy thermometer
- Cheesecloth and a mould or colander for draining
- For aged cheese: a controlled space for ageing

03 Method

- **1.** Heat milk to the temperature specified for your chosen cheese.
- **2.** Add culture and/or rennet (or acid, for simple fresh cheeses) and allow curds to form.
- **3.** Cut the curd and allow whey to separate.
- **4.** Drain in cheesecloth, then press if making a firmer cheese.
- **5.** For fresh cheese, use promptly; for aged cheese, salt and age in controlled conditions for weeks to months.

04 Troubleshooting

- **Curds not forming properly** — check milk hasn't been ultra-pasteurised (which often won't set), and that temperature and rennet/culture amounts match the recipe.
- **Bitter or off flavours** — often from ageing conditions being too warm, or contamination; keep ageing spaces clean and at the correct temperature.
- **Cheese too soft/won't hold shape** — insufficient draining or pressing time; extend and ensure adequate whey has separated.
- **Mould issues during ageing** — some cheeses want specific surface moulds, others don't; research the specific cheese type, as generic advice doesn't apply universally.

05 Timing & maintenance

BEST TIME	Any time milk is available; fresh cheeses are a good year-round project, aged cheeses benefit from stable ageing conditions.
DURATION	Fresh cheese: a few hours. Aged cheese: weeks to many months depending on the style.
MAINTENANCE	Aged cheeses need regular turning and monitoring during the ageing period.
SIGNS OF SUCCESS	Clean curd separation, good texture for the style attempted, and (for aged cheese) appropriate rind development.

06 Tips & variations

PAIRS WELL WITH

- Milking Sheep & Goats
- Butter & Cream

COMMON MISTAKES

- Using ultra-pasteurised milk, which often won't set properly
- Rushing draining or pressing time for firmer cheese styles

PRO TIP

Start with a simple fresh cheese like ricotta or a basic chèvre before attempting anything requiring long ageing — the feedback loop is much faster and far more forgiving.