

## Gourmet Cheese Made Easy

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I am definitely not a vegetarian, but the truth is that I could more easily give up meat than I could cheese. Just thinking about a fine cheddar on a crisp cracker with a bit of homemade nectarine mustard makes me smile fondly. I like to cook—at least, I like to play with cooking, even if the normal humdrum production of meals sometimes bores me. So, I can make that nectarine mustard without any problem. But homemade cheddar is definitely beyond both my skills and my kitchen equipment.

Fortunately, there are other options. Many of the soft cheeses are well within my reach and require nothing more elaborate than the pots I already have and a bit of cheesecloth or muslin. On September 7th and again on September 11th, the Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County offer a free class on how to make ricotta, yogurt cheese, queso blanco, and other soft cheeses. My personal favorite is the yogurt cheese because yogurt and cheese run a tight race for #1 on my food list. What could possibly be better than combining the two? Plus—and this is the selling point—it's *dead* easy.

I attended the cheese making class a year ago and the first lesson was that when making cheese, the work area and all the equipment must be scrupulously clean or all you'll end up with is a marvelously effective incubator for unwanted molds or yeasts. But tackle that problem successfully, and most of the work is done. For yogurt cheese your supplies are simple: a large tub of whatever plain yogurt you choose, a square of muslin or several thicknesses of fine-weave cheesecloth, and some seasonings or other flavorings to add at the end of the process. The yogurt gets suspended in an impromptu bag made out of the muslin or cheesecloth and hung over a bowl until sufficient moisture has drained out. You end up with a thick product that has a tart flavor characteristic of a fresh yogurt, and then you season it. How's that for simple?

Dressing up the yogurt cheese takes it from good to marvelous. An herb cheese is easy to make with a little chive, dill, garlic, and black pepper. Honey and spices make a wonderful dessert cheese. The possibilities are endless and your guests will be amazed at your gourmet skills. Don't tell the truth about how easy it was. You probably don't get sufficient credit for all the other hard work you do, so grab a freebie with yogurt cheese.

All of the soft cheeses taught at “Basics of Cheese Making” on September 7th and 11th are simple, no-nonsense recipes easily done in the home kitchen. The classes are *free* (how much better can this get?) and are offered at the at the Bethell- Delfino Ag Building at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. Both classes begin at 10 am and end around noon. Master Food Preservers are also available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. More information about Master Food Preservers is available at [http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master\\_Food\\_Preservers/](http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/). Advance reservations for the classes are not necessary. I'll be there again. This year maybe I'll try making the ricotta cheese. My lasagna could use a little face lift. See you there!