

Feta

By Lady Isabell Winter

A pure white, salty Greek cheese, pleasant in flavor, lightly sour and rich in aroma – often made with goat or sheep milk, but can be easily made using cows milk although will not have the same flavour/aroma. Generally formed in squares. Although it is considered a soft cheese, it is also produced with a semi hard texture.

Due to its greater humidity content, soft feta is sweeter, less salty, rich in aroma and less spicy, while semi-hard feta is saltier and spicier, having a stronger taste and aroma. The hard feta is saltier and spicier, and has a stronger flavor and odor. Commercial feta generally goes through a two month maturation at least, this being the period of development of all its organoleptic and qualitative characteristics, which make the difference from other soft cheeses of the same category.

Lasts up to 6 weeks in brine, longer in olive oil

Day 1:

- Heat 10L milk to 32°C in a water bath (or 3L for a smaller quantity)
- Add 1/8 teaspoon culture (or few crumbs if only using 3L)
- Add 10ml rennet diluted in 10ml cooled boiled water or 5ml vegetable coagulant (modulase) in 5ml cooled boiled water (*3ml rennet or 1 1/2 t modulase with equal quantity water for 3L milk batch*)
- Leave to set in warm waterbath for approx 45 minutes until firm
- Cut the curd into 1cm cubes, stir gently to ensure equal size, cut larger cubes down.
- Let settle for 5 minutes
- Gradually heat to 35°C – 38°C. Ensure uniform temperature throughout. Stir gently until curd becomes firm and elastic in texture. It is very important to do this gradually over half an hour.
- Let settle for another 5 minutes
- Place sterilized cheesecloth/muslin over a rectangular frame or shape approx 2.5cm deep which sits on a draining rack. Using sterilized sieve, ladle the curd onto the cloth (in the frame)
- Fold cloth over and place a board on top and then a weight of 10kg – a bucket containing 10L of water works well. Don't have to add weight is a personal choice.
- Press for 20-30 minutes until the curd knits together.
- After removing the weight (an hour is good), sprinkle all surfaces with salt and leave covered with a cheese cloth over night

Day 2:

- Cut the cheese into 10 pieces. Sprinkle again with salt and rub in, especially on the cut surfaces. Leave to increase acidity at room temperature on draining board, covered with a clean cloth.
- Cut into slices and turn around
- The more you turn the dryer the cheese will become (*more cuts allow the whey to escape from trapped chambers, which results in the dryer cheese*)
- Salt gives flavour but also dries it out.

Day 3:

Store the cheese either

a) for short term - rub again with salt, pack into sterilized plastic container and place in the refrigerator. Leave to mature for one week. Rub with salt after a few days or as required to prevent mould growth

or

b) for long term storage – after a few days make 20% brine solution in one litre boiling water and 200gm salt, stir well and allow to cool. Then float the cheese in the solution in a sterilized container with a lid. This method is preferable for longer storage.

Usually the cheese is stored in 20% brine solution, however after a short brining time – its delicious if stored in a jar with dried granulated garlic, olives and olive oil (do brine for one week then oil)

Make sure the cheese is absolutely dry from the salty brine solution before placing in a jar with the olive oil or else it will separate out.

Also ensure that the cheese is always below the level of the oil or else it will go mouldy.

You can eat after the cheese has been brined for a few days.

History

The history of cheese is as old as humanity itself, and is connected to the taming of domestic animals 10,000 years B.C ago. The roots of cheese making are not known with certainty. It is, however believed that cheese was first prepared roughly 8,000 years ago. It is very likely its discovery was completely accidental, during transport of milk in stomachs of young animals by nomads.

Feta cheese has been produced and enjoyed throughout the countries of the eastern Mediterranean since antiquity. Feta cheese is recorded in the Byzantine Empire under the name “prosphatos”, (meaning recent, ie fresh) and was associated specifically with Crete, located in modern day Greece. An Italian visitor to Candia in 1494 describes its storage in brine clearly (Dalby, 1996, p 190).

The Greek word “feta” comes from the Italian word *fetta* (meaning slice) and that from the Latin *offa* (meaning bite, morsel) It was introduced into the Greek language in the 17th century, likely referring to the method of cutting the cheese into thin slices to serve on a plate.

Traditionally, feta has been made by peasants in the lower Balkan Peninsula from sheep's milk, although goat's milk has been used in more recent times.

To the modern person, the word Feta means brine cheese, traditionally made with sheep or goats milk but these days also cows milk.

According to Greek mythology, the gods sent Aristaios, son of Apollo, to teach Greeks the art of cheese making.

There are a lot of records regarding production and consumption of cheese in ancient Greece, from Aristotle's, Pythagoras and other ancient comedy writers. It has been known at least since Homer's time. The cheese that was prepared by Cyclope Polyfimos and described in the 8th B.C century in Homer's Odyssey, is considered to be the ancestor of Feta:

“We entered the cave, but he wasn't there, only his plump sheep grazed in the meadow. The woven baskets were full of cheese, the folds were full of sheep and goats and all his pots, tubs and churns where he drew the milk, were full of whey. When half of the snow-white milk curdled he collected it, put it in the woven baskets and kept the other half in a tub to drink. Why my good ram are you the last to leave the fold? You have never been left behind by the flock before. You were always first walking ahead to graze the tender sheets of grass.”

According to myth, Cyclope Polyfimos was the first to prepare cheese. Transporting the milk that he collected from his sheep in skinbags made of animal stomachs, one day he realized to his great surprise that the milk had curdled and had taken a solid, tasty and conservable form.

In the museum of Delphi, a statuette of the 6th B.C century can be found that depicts the exit of Ulysses hanging under the Cyclopes favorite ram. 8,000 year later the way Feta is produced remains much the same, differing only in areas such as automation and packaging.

The Ancient Greeks called the product that emanated from the coagulation of milk “cheese”. The name Feta (lit. “slice”) originated in the 17th century, and probably refers to the practice of slicing up the cheese to be placed into barrels. The name Feta prevailed in the 18th century, and since then has characterised a cheese that has been prepared for centuries using the same general technique, and whose origin is lost in time.

<http://www.fetamania.gr/english/index.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feta_cheese

<http://www.greek-recipe.com/static/greek-cheese/feta.html>

<http://www.fs.cvut.cz/cz/u218/peoples/hoffman/PREDMETY/VLP/PLpresentation/Feta%20cheese%20production.doc>

<http://www.cheesemakingrecipe.com/feta.html>