



CHURNING YOUR OWN BUTTER

by A. Brent Smith

Some of the fondest memories I have from my childhood were the evenings I spent helping my late grandmother churn butter from the milk my grandfather harvested from his cows. While my brother and cousins would rather be off playing football, I loved sitting at the churn, working the dasher and listening to granny telling stories of times past. With our hurried pace of life, these simple times and once important skills seem to have vanished, but maybe they don't have to.

Making butter isn't really that hard of a project to undertake. You have to start with fresh whole milk from whatever critter you have to work with. In the past we raised cows, but in the last several years I've switched to goats, whose milk works just as well. To begin with you will put the milk in gallon sized large mouth glass jars and set them in the refrigerator, or if you're a purist, in the spring house until the heavy cream separates from the remaining milk. A lot of folks talk about having difficulty separating goat milk, but if you're patient it will separate just like cow milk, it just takes a few more hours. When this has occurred you will see a very distinct line of separation, with the cream floating to the top. Once the cream has separated out, it can be

ladled off and placed into a separate container. Be sure not to agitate the separated liquids as this would cause them to mix and then you would have to start all over again. Once the separation is finished, the remaining liquid would be similar to whole milk you purchase at the



A Dazey churn and a traditional crock churn with dasher.

local grocer. A friend of mine says its closer to skim milk, but I can usually read the newspaper through skim milk, and I can't with this milk.

Once the cream has been separated from the milk it will need to

sit at room temperature for 12-15 hours. This will allow the cream to begin clabber, coagulating and starts the process of making the actual butter. You can add some buttermilk or enzymes to advance the clabbering, but it usually gives the butter a different, stronger flavor not everybody likes. After the cream has set, fill the churn no more than half full. Several types of churns can be chosen from. Hand cranked, motorized, or old fashioned dasher styles all exist. You can even put the cream in a jug and just shake it until the butter forms. No matter what type of churn you decide to use, they basically all work on the same principle. For this text, we will be using a 5 gallon ceramic crock churn with a wooden dasher. Many folks advocate using a blender or some other electric powered device, but I think this takes the fun out of the whole process.

Once the cream is in the churn, put the lid and dasher in place and begin a steady up and down beat with the dasher. Don't rush the process as rapid churning can cause problems with the coagulation of the butter and will create a lesser quality product. After 20-30 minutes the butter will begin to appear in curds that will float on the liquid



Removing the cream from fresh milk



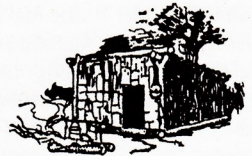
The butter after it has been molded in an old fashioned butter mold

and will stick to the handle of the dasher. Continue churning until no more curds seem to be forming. This should happen at about 40 to 45 minutes from the start of churning. Don't churn too long as you can re-agitate the liquids into the soft butter basically ruining it. Remove the lid from the churn and scoop out the butter curds into a colander to allow more liquid to drain off. The butter will be soft and mushy due to some liquid still being incorporated into the mix. Now you need to knead and rinse the new

butter with cold running water to help remove more of the remaining milk. Do this while the butter is still in the colander, or a cheese cloth. The liquid remaining in the churn is will be similar to skim milk if you didn't add buttermilk or other enzymes nor allowed it to ferment for a longer period of time. It will be classic buttermilk if you added anything or if the milk were allowed to fully ferment. Either way this by-product has several uses around the kitchen and is also good to drink cold with a big bowl of pinto beans.

When the water has drained off the new butter, place it into a bowl and set it in the refrigerator to cool. If you want a real treat, spread some of the soft, new butter on a piece of fresh bread and take a big bite. You won't find many things any better. After about an hour in the refrigerator the butter will have become firm enough to begin molding. At this point you have a decision to make on whether or not you wish to salt your butter. Butter that is going to be used for baking or used fairly quickly really doesn't need to be salted. If you want to salt the butter you will need to weigh the butter and add 1/4 teaspoon of non-iodized salt for every 4 ounces of butter. Be sure to stir thoroughly to mix the salt evenly through the butter. Salted butter appears to last a little longer than non-salted. You can also mix any of a vast array of herbs into your butter to get whatever flavor you like. Anyone that has raised milk cows or goats can

testify about the onion tasting milk and products you'll get in the spring. The wild onions will give you a very flavorful butter indeed. After you have made the decision on salting or not you can begin molding the butter into whatever shape and size you want to use. Several different styles of butter molds can be purchased, or just using an old bowl will work. If you have produced a large amount of butter you can wrap it in wax paper and place into the freezer. Frozen butter will last several months without getting freezer burn. See, nothing to it. I hope you will give butter making a try. Whether you just want to try something new, are concerned about what additives are placed in your food, or are concerned about the proposed new taxes on "unhealthy" foods, making butter can be a fun and useful new skill to look into. It may also help you relive some memories of trips to granny and grandpa's house. abs



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