

#1 How do I hold milk at a given temperature?

Stabilizing your milk's temperature can be challenging to do on a typical stove. Our favorite method is to create a kind of giant double boiler by perching your milk pot inside a larger pot of water that is at or a bit above the desired temperature. This whole arrangement can be removed from the burner and will hold its temperature fairly well. You can slide it back onto the heat for a few minutes as needed.

#2 When is it time to "cut the curd"?

Observe the curd to determine when it is ready to cut. Jiggling the pot will show you that the "gel" consistency has formed, but you will also need to get a "clean break" to know it is ready. To do this, insert your curd knife a few inches, cut a short distance, lean the knife over at an angle, and pull it back out. You should see the curd separate nicely and the knife should come out with minimal residue. It won't be as firm as jello—more like a commercial yogurt. Once you get a clean break, you are ready to cut the curd into "cubes."

#3 How do I "cut the curd"?

First, relax: this is not a precise process, and your "cubes" won't be cubical. (However, if you begin to cut the curd and find that it is breaking up into small particles or getting "mushed," stop and let it set a while longer.) To cut the curd, insert the knife, at an angle, all the way to the bottom of the pot and make a slicing motion all the way across. Repeat this motion, making a series of diagonal slices about $\frac{1}{2}$ apart across the whole pot. Next, inserting your curd knife into the same slice lines, re-cut with your diagonal going the opposite direction. If you could see below the surface of your curd at this point, you would see that it has been cut into diamond-shaped rows. Next, turn the pot 90 degrees (a quarter turn) and repeat the previous two steps. The curd will now be cut into something resembling cubes. Remember, a little messy is O.K.

#4 What is "cooking the curd"?

After you have cut the curd, many recipes call for “cooking the curd” next. Cooking the curd simply means slowly raising its temperature over a period of time. This process causes the pieces of curd to release even more whey, making them smaller and firmer. It also allows the culture more time to work. When cooking the curd, you can use the arrangement described in #1 above. Monitor the temperature carefully and cycle the stove on and off as needed. During this time, very gently stir the curds about every 10 minutes. You can stir with a slotted spoon or a well-scrubbed bare hand. The purpose of stirring is to keep the curds from matting together too much and to distribute the heat evenly throughout.

#5 How do I hang cheese curd or yogurt?

Hanging cheese or yogurt curd in cheesecloth is quite simple. First, spread the cheesecloth inside of a strainer or colander. Pour or ladle the curds and whey onto the cheesecloth. After a minute or two, gather up the four corners of the cloth. You can tie it closed with a piece of string (this will form a tighter ball of curd) or just use the ends of the cloth for tying. Suspend the “bag” somewhere where it can hang and drain freely. We like to tie it around a long wooden spoon that is lying crosswise on top of a tall stockpot.

#6 Can I reuse my cheesecloth?

Yes, you can! As soon as possible after use, rinse the cheesecloth thoroughly in cold water to remove all the bits of curd. If they dry onto the cloth, they become very hard to remove. Next boil the cheesecloth in water for a few minutes to sanitize it, and then let it air dry. Fold it up and store it in a plastic bag or container until next time. When you pull it out to reuse it, boil it again to be certain it is clean. Be cautious if you are using wet cheesecloth to strain any fine curd such as yogurt; it may not strain as well as dry cheesecloth.