

Published April 1st, 2020

A hearty appetizer for the home-bound

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Fresh Ricotta Cheese with Chickpea Flatbread and Tomato-onion Relish Photo Susie Iventosch

Even though making your own cheese at home sounds a bit daunting, this ricotta recipe is super easy and really fun to do. This cheese is delicious as an appetizer, but also works great in the filling for homemade lasagna. It takes about 20 minutes or so to heat the milk and cream to the right temperature and then it's just a matter of how firm or soft you want your cheese to be that will determine the total time involved. Whole milk makes a much better ricotta than low-fat milk, and it's best to find one that is not ultra-pasteurized. Ultra-pasteurized milk is not recommended because it has already been heated to a very high temperature of 280 degrees Fahrenheit which prevents it from curdling properly. Normally-pasteurized milk has been heated to a much lower temperature of between 145 and 161 F. You need the curds and whey to separate for making ricotta, so just stick to normally-pasteurized milk for this project!

Homemade Ricotta

(Yields approximately 2 cups)

INGREDIENTS

8 cups whole milk
 1/2 cup heavy cream
 1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
 2 tablespoons fresh squeezed lemon juice (pulp strained out)
 2 tablespoons rice vinegar (can also use white wine vinegar)

DIRECTIONS

In a medium-large pot, slowly heat the milk and cream together until it reaches 185 F, stirring occasionally along the way. The best way to measure the temperature is to clip a candy or instant read thermometer to the side of the pot when you first begin the process.

While the milk mixture is heating, line a colander with cheesecloth and sit it over a bowl. Set aside. Mix the lemon juice and vinegar in a small container.

Once the temperature reaches 185 F, remove the pot from the heat and immediately stir in the salt. Slowly drizzle the lemon juice and rice vinegar over the top. Stir gently with a silicon spoon or spatula until the curds begin to form.

Ladel the curds into the colander and roll any loose edges of cheesecloth over the top of the cheese. Allow to drain until it reaches the consistency you desire. This can take anywhere from 20 minutes to a few hours, depending upon how firm you like your ricotta. Store the cheese in an airtight container for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

Chickpea Flatbread

INGREDIENTS

1 cup garbanzo bean flour
 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
 3/4 teaspoon salt
 1 tablespoon olive oil
 1 cup water

DIRECTIONS

Mix flour, coriander, cumin and salt with water and oil. Stir well and cover with plastic wrap. Allow to sit on the counter at room temperature for about 2 hours. When ready to cook, preheat oven to broil. When hot, place cast iron skillet in the oven for about 5 minutes. Very carefully and using a thick hot pad or mitt, remove pan from oven and spray with cooking spray. Pour half of the batter into the pan and swirl to coat bottom of pan. Put pan in the oven and cook for about 3-5 minutes, or until the bread is beginning to brown on top and the edges are looking crispy. Remove from oven and slice into wedges. Repeat with remaining batter. Serve with a scoop of ricotta and a spoonful of tomato-onion relish.

Tomato-onion Relish

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons olive oil
 1 small clove garlic, minced
 1 small yellow onion, diced
 1 cup chopped fresh tomatoes
 Salt and pepper to taste

Heat oil in frying pan. Add onion and cook until translucent. Add garlic and tomato and continue to cook just until tomatoes soften and onions begin to brown. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve over ricotta on chickpea flatbread.



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