

Homemade Butter

Making butter is easy, and the results are sweeter and creamier than prepackaged brands from the store.

Homemade, fresh organic butter can be made in minutes—10, to be exact. All that's needed is cream and an electric mixer.

Nutrition

While it's a good idea to consume butter in moderation, when made with cream from grass-fed cows raised on pasture, it does have virtues that go beyond its rich flavor. Such butter is high in conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), a beneficial fatty acid that protects against some forms of cancer. CLA has been shown to lower total cholesterol and reduce atherosclerosis in animals. Butter from grass-fed cows also contains high levels of vitamin E and beta-carotene (which is responsible for the yellow color in butter). Best of all, homemade butter provides a brilliant, pure flavor without additives or preservatives.

How-to

Butter Basics When making butter, you'll get about half as much butter as the amount of cream used, plus residual "butter" milk produced by the process. Thus: 1 quart (32 ounces) cream yields 1 pound (16 ounces) butter plus 2 cups buttermilk; 1 cup cream yields 1/2 cup butter plus about 1/2 cup buttermilk.

For best results, use organic cream with a butterfat content of at least 35 percent. Most organic creams and heavy whipping cream work well.

Pour the cream into a bowl, set the electric mixer on medium speed, and blend.

The cream transforms first into fluffy whipped cream and then stiff peaks. These break down into soft cottage-cheese-like curds as blobs of butterfat separate from the milk. The butter begins to stiffen and clump together and the watery milk pools in the bottom of the bowl. This should take about 10 minutes.

At this point, stop the mixer. Carefully pour off as much milk as possible and refrigerate it. Although this "buttermilk" is not like the thick, tangy buttermilk you'll find in the market, it can be used for cooking, baking, and drinking.

Use a rubber or stiff metal spatula to press the butter to squeeze out as much of the liquid as possible. Add about 1/2 cup ice water to the butter and use the spatula to press the butter and water against the side of the bowl. This step, called washing, is important to keep the butter from spoiling. Pour off the cloudy liquid. Add more ice water and repeat the process two or three times until the water becomes less cloudy.

Continue kneading butter against the side of the bowl until all the liquid has been pressed out. Sprinkle with sea salt, if desired.

Pack the butter in containers, wrap tightly, and cover. Wrapping butter in grease-proof paper adds a touch of elegance. As a bonus, the butter won't stick to the parchment as it does to plastic wrap. For storing, first wrap in parchment, if desired, then wrap in plastic wrap or foil to make an airtight package.

Refrigerate up to 1 week or freeze for up to 6 months.

Fun for Kids

Shake It Up Take advantage of children's jiggly, giggly energy to turn butter making into a fun family project. Simply pour 1/4 cup of organic cream into a jar, tighten the lid, and shake, shake, shake. After 15 to 30 minutes of nonstop agitation, the butterfat will separate in clumps from the liquid. When that happens, drain the milk and place the butter into a bowl. Continue with the instructions for washing and kneading as described in the basic technique.

Compound Butters

Boost the flavor of grilled fish or steak, steamed vegetables, oven-hot biscuits, or fluffy pancakes with compound butters created by stirring herbs, chives, garlic, spices, or even fresh and dried fruits into softened butter. Follow the basic technique, add the desired flavors and place the flavored butter on parchment paper. Roll it into a log, wrap securely, and refrigerate or freeze until ready to use. Then cut off small coins to serve.

Some combos to try with softened, unsalted butter:

Lemon zest and snipped parsley

Snipped fresh Thai basil, chopped garlic, and chopped, drained, pickled ginger

Crumbled feta cheese and chopped kalamata olives

Grated Parmesan cheese and snipped fresh basil

Grated ginger and sesame oil

Snipped fresh cilantro, lime zest, and Sriracha, or hot sauce

Coarsely ground black pepper and sea salt

Orange zest, chopped fresh or dried cranberries, and snipped fresh sage

Chopped pecans and honey

Orange zest, maple syrup, and blueberries