

THE WHITE MOUSTACHE YOGURT AND WHEY

MAKES 1 GALLON OF YOGURT

Plan ahead! This recipe occurs in stages over the course of 3 days (mostly inactive time).

This yogurt-making technique is the one I learned to make as a child and the one I make at home today. It has informed how I make yogurt at The White Moustache, how I run my business, how I run my life. It has helped me find my place in this world.

I feel like I'm sharing a secret family recipe with you—although it's thousands of years old and it belongs to all of us. As you make yogurt following this ancient and beautiful method, my ancestors and I will be right there with you, every step of the way. I have nothing bigger to offer.

EQUIPMENT

Large pot—make sure there is at least 3 inches of headroom after you've poured in your gallon of milk

Mixing spoon

2 large blankets, ideally flannel

Small kitchen towel

Large ceramic bowl—at least 1 gallon capacity

Teacup

Cover for the ceramic bowl—not a tight-fitting lid, but just a plate or tray that covers the entire mouth of the bowl

1 gallon whole milk

3 tablespoons plain whole milk yogurt, as your starter

DAY 1: Start this process in the evening, 3½ hours before you go to bed.

Play music you listen to when you feel like you are totally in love—with your family, a wonderful moment, a partner, a time in your life.

Pour the milk into the pot and bring it to a boil over medium heat,

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stirring almost continuously to avoid getting a crust on the bottom. That crust will eventually burn, and that burn will take hours to clean out and quite possibly leave you with a permanent pot tattoo.

Pay close attention: the instant the milk starts to erupt, turn off the heat and remove the pot from the burner. Stir the milk, allowing it to start cooling.

Meanwhile, lay the blankets on top of each other on a kitchen countertop or other flat surface in a warm place free of any drafts. Put the kitchen towel right in the middle of the blankets and place the ceramic bowl on top. When the milk is no longer scalding-hot, pour it into the ceramic bowl and let it cool.

The milk will take 35 to 45 minutes to cool, depending on the ambient temperature of your home, the time of year, your altitude, and where your milk came from. The variables go on, but you can walk away at this point. Don't go far. Call a friend, enjoy the music, meditate—just don't forget about the milk.

At around the 35-minute mark, take your starter out of the fridge and let it warm up to room temperature on the counter.

Dip your pinkie finger into the bowl of milk. If you can hold your pinkie in the milk for 3 seconds, your milk is ready to culture. This is not a masochistic test, but an intuitive one, so trust yourself. (Pinkie fingers are a tried-and-true test in many cultures and surprisingly do not differ greatly in their sensitivity from person to person. My pinkie is small and dainty, and my dad's is fat as a sausage, yet we both have the same feeling with respect to timing and milk temperatures.)

At 35 minutes, the milk will most likely still be too hot. But you will start to gain an idea of how milk loses its heat, and what a gradual process it is (milk holds heat *very* well). You're looking for warm, not hot. If the milk is still too hot—if you want to jerk your pinkie out immediately—come back and test again every minute or two. Do *not* go on to the next step until you can pass the "pinkie test"—remember, you'll be adding live cultures to your yogurt, and they need to survive. If the milk is too hot, it will kill the cultures and the yogurt won't set. If it's too cold, they will not activate enough.

When you can comfortably keep your pinkie in the milk for 3 seconds, scoop some milk

into your teacup and add the yogurt starter. Stir to break it all up and “activate” the probiotics. This is similar to activating yeast in warm water.

Dump that cup of diluted mother culture into the ceramic bowl. Give it one strong stir and then leave it. The cultures will disperse themselves.

Set whatever cover you’re using on top of the bowl—remember, you do *not* want a tight-fitting lid.

Wrap the blankets up and over the covered bowl, making a cocoon with no room for drafts. This will help your yogurt stay warm overnight and keep the milk’s temperature from dropping too quickly, which can lead to thin, flaccid yogurt.

Do the dishes, brush your teeth, go to bed.

DAY 2: First thing in the morning

The yogurt will get as much sleep as you do. It is fine. Telling you how much time to incubate yogurt is like telling you how long to sleep. I recommend 8 or 9 hours. Yogurt is just as alive as you are. Wake up, brush your teeth, unwrap the yogurt, feel the side of the ceramic bowl, and marvel at how it is still warm. Marvel further at the millions of gorgeous probiotics you have nurtured into life.

Uncover and take a whiff of the newly fermented milk. It will smell earthy and creamy. Visually, it will vary in appearance from batch to batch. As a living food, this is normal. Sometimes it will look like a still lake. Other times, it will look like the surface of the moon, especially if your milk frothed when you poured it into the bowl. Either way, once fully incubated, it will look set (you’ll know when you see it what that means) and there will be a ring of whey at the edges of your bowl.

Put the lid back on the bowl and put it in the fridge. Go about your day.



DAY 3

It will take about 20 hours for the yogurt to reach the temperature of the refrigerator. Waiting a day is an important part of the process, as the yogurt will continue to set as it chills. It will always be alive and working.

Your yogurt is now optimal to strain or eat.