



# Keeping Time

BY ANITRA KITTS

practices that once supported medieval monasteries as a way to start keeping Sabbath time rather than allowing “microwave time” to keep them.

## Cooking as Connecting

Each of these practices relies on skills first discovered before recorded history, then refined for generations. To start measuring four and a half cups of flour into a bowl is to step out onto the well-worn path of men and women who have combined flour with water and salt and sometimes yeast for nearly 7,000 years or more.<sup>1</sup> If entering into Sabbath time is to enter into another understanding of time that stretches beyond the horizon of our lifetimes, then plunging one’s hands into warm dough is to plunge into an understanding of time that transcends the immediate and enters into both ancient and future time.

Thirty years ago, the English food writer Elizabeth Davis reminded us that the fourteenth-century word for yeast was *goddisgoode*, which proclaims the wisdom that yeast is both a blessing and a mystery.<sup>2</sup> Peter Reinhart, a baker and author, compared bakers to abbots, saying that both were “to serve as guides and guardians of the souls in their charge.”<sup>3</sup>

Yeast and the bacteria that ages cheese are living things that grow, process sugars and give off gases, alcohol and acids that lift bread dough, shape the taste and texture of cheese, and turn water, hops and malt into a refreshing beverage for the end of a long, hot day. They work in secret, at a size too small for us to observe with our ordinary sight. But their efforts become vividly evident in the smell and sight of rising dough, in the bubbling mash in the brewing fermentor, and in the

“**I wish I had more time to cook,**” the stranger confided to me in the aisle at the local grocery store. We had immediately bonded while giving advice to a third shopper on the differences between basmati and jasmine rice, and then gone on to discuss the uses for arborial rice. “I work now, and there just isn’t the time. I miss it,” she said with a sigh. “Sometimes, on the weekend . . .” her voice trailed off in an unfinished, wistful thought.

In a culture where multitasking is now prized as an alpha life skill, where fewer and fewer workers take a vacation for fear of shifting a burden to their colleagues—or worse, being exposed as nonessential—and intense commute times collide with the highly scheduled lives of children, it seems impossibly nostalgic to think about taking the time to bake bread, brew beer or make cheese. Yet, more and more women and men are choosing to make room in their lives for these ancient

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tangy, smooth mouthful of fromage blanc. To make cheese, bread and beer is to enter into a Sabbath time governed by organic rhythms that require us to surrender our anxiety-driven needs for speed, short cuts and superhuman deadlines. When we set aside the Blackberry and pick up the cheese ladle, we are rewarded with foods that taste rich with time.

## Cooking as Celebration

As rewarding as it is to midwife this food, it also is rewarding to share it with friends, family members and guests. Jeff Hoffmeyer, a father of two small children and a candidate for ministry in the PC(USA), took up brewing beer to celebrate the birth of his second child, Andersen Hoffmeyer. "I made up labels, called it Andersen Ale, and sent it out as a birth announcement," Jeff said. "I've made about six or seven batches since then. I try to time them for when company is here. It's satisfying to start with ingredients and end up with beer. It's a lot more satisfying than going to the store and buying it. And my friends appreciate it more." For Jeff, brewing beer is an extension of his desire to show hospitality to friends and family. "It represents something

I've put myself into, not just my money." Through this gift of home-brewed beer, Jeff's Sabbath time of waiting on yeast is extended to his immediate community.

It is easy to make fresh cheeses such as ricotta, mozzarella, chèvre and feta in one's own kitchen. Neither the tools nor the processes are complicated. Brewing beer is slightly more complicated in that it uses some specialty tools such as a fermentor, fermentor cap and modest bottling or keg storage equipment. Bread is as close as the bin of flour and the kitchen sink. "There is so much we buy," Jeff said, "but then we find out how easy it is to make it. And it tastes better when we make it."

To make beer, bread or cheese requires short periods of attentive work surrounded by longer periods of allowing yeasts and bacteria to work their magic. A few weekend hours are sufficient to start and tend the food and brew. Making our own food helps us see where it comes from. Because we are working with it, measuring it, stirring it, heating it and checking on it, we become intimately aware of how a gallon of milk changes from white liquid to tangy solid; how a gooey

mass of water and flour becomes a soft bite of warm goodness. We become aware of how, fundamentally, all this goodness flows from the gift of life, the activity of living creatures. When our eyes are opened, we start to see how God's ongoing works of creation not only sustain us, but bless us.

My new friend in the grocery store knew she was missing something when she stopped cooking with intentionality. To learn to make cheese, bread and beer and to make time to practice those arts is to reclaim our connection to God's creative acts of hospitality and goodness. It is a Sabbath practice. 🍷

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## Notes

1. Alan Davidson, *The Oxford Companion to Food* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 95–102.
2. Elizabeth David, *English Bread and Yeast Cookery, New American Edition* (Newton, Mass.: Biscuit Books, 1995), 92.
3. Peter Reinhart, *Brother Juniper's Bread Books: Slow Rise as Method and Metaphor* (Philadelphia: Running Press, 2005), 29.



## Here's How One PW Celebrates!



Jennie Oppenheimer/imagines.com

For the past two years (and we're working on number three!) Presbyterian Women at Southminster Presbyterian Church in Marietta, Georgia, has planned a Sunday afternoon tea party to celebrate our local Girl Scouts and their mothers. The tables are set with bone china and silver. There is a wonderful dress-up area, with full-length mirrors and big hats, gloves, heels, high-fashion gowns and furs. Even the mothers dress up!

A member of our PW gives a short lecture on etiquette and how to behave at a tea party (always with humor). We always have young ladies who have never tasted a cucumber sandwich or experienced a delicious petit four (until now!).

Jan Boehm  
Marietta, Georgia

## Two-hour Cheese (Whole-milk Ricotta)

Traditional ricotta is made from whey, a liquid that is left behind when the second step of cheese making is completed and the curd is separated from the milk. This is a recipe for making ricotta directly from a gallon of milk. It uses an acidic fluid, such as lemon juice, to precipitate the curd from the milk and it is intended for immediate use. Not only is this a great first recipe for beginning cheese makers, it also beats store-bought ricotta every time. Many cooks will use ricotta in place of cottage cheese when preparing lasagna.

### Ingredients and Tools

#### Ingredients

- 1 gallon of milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of lemon juice or  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of white vinegar
- salt (preferably kosher or sea salt)

Whole milk will deliver the most taste, but low-fat milk will work as well. Avoid milk that is ultra-pasteurized. Ultra-pasteurization will prolong the shelf life of milk but it alters the protein structure to the point that ultra-pasteurized milk will not form a curd. While raw milk offers a deeper range of regionally specific flavors and a strong curd, it can also contain a risk of undesirable bacteria such as *E. coli* and salmonella. That risk becomes nearly null when a cheese is aged longer than eight weeks but is a concern when making fresh cheeses such as ricotta or *chèvre frais*.

#### Tools

- pot large enough to hold a gallon of milk (best if it is non-reactive to acidic fluids)
- spoon long enough to stir the entire pot of milk
- colander
- thermometer
- butter muslin cloth

What is often sold as cheesecloth in the grocery store is too flimsy and the weave is too open to actually use as cheesecloth. What is required is a cloth that will allow liquid to pass through easily while retaining the curd. A large piece (three feet square) torn from an old white (clean!) bed sheet will suffice if butter muslin can't be found.



Jennie Oppenheimer/Images.com

### Cheese-making Steps

1. Pour the milk into the pan, place over heat and gently raise the temperature to around 200 degrees. Stir the milk from time to time to avoid scorching (burning).
2. Add either lemon juice or white vinegar.
3. The curd (firm, white clumps) should separate from the whey (yellowish liquid) almost immediately. Remove from the heat and allow the pan to rest for 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Line the colander with the butter muslin. Scoop the curds and the whey into the cloth so that the whey drains, leaving the curd behind.
5. Once the whey has drained off, lift the cloth and the curd out of the colander and tie it off so that it forms a bag. Hang the bag so that whey can continue to drip off for at least an hour. The longer the ricotta drains, the dryer it will be.
6. After an hour (or longer, if less moisture is desired) place the ricotta in a bowl or storage container. Add salt to your taste ( $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp). Use right away or store, for up to a week in the refrigerator.