

It is a chilly, wet day—the kind we have missed the last couple of springs. We are grateful for the moisture, and the grass agrees with us. Green grass provides feed for Junie, the Guernsey/Jersey that is our young milk cow. And those green grass meals she enjoys result in lots of rich milk. Turning the cream separator crank every morning gives me an opportunity to watch the thin stream of bright yellow cream filling a quart Mason jar. Most of that cream will eventually become butter, but the skim milk that flows in a larger stream from the other spout of the separator is also very useful, even though we drink no milk. The three little pigs consume much of it, but there is still skim milk for cottage cheese.

Homemade cottage cheese is a completely different food from the commercial kind. It has more flavor, is a different texture, and in our case, can be made from milk that otherwise might be wasted.

My mother made lots of cottage cheese. She would bring skim milk from the barn, pour it into a big kettle and set it on the back of the cookstove in a warm, but not hot, spot. A day or so later it was a solid curd, She broke this up with her hands and warmed it slowly until the mass of curds released the whey. Then, she squeezed the curds with her hands, filled a bowl with the crumbly cheese, and added salt, pepper, and cream. It was always very good.

I use a little different process, partly because we don't usually have a fire in the cookstove during the summer. I bring the warm skim milk to the cabin, pour it into a big stainless steel kettle, and then add a bit of powdered "starter" that is used for hard cheese, as well. The kettle sits at room temperature until the next day, and by that time, it has become a solid, shiny curd.

And, then, I appreciate a day like today—chilly and damp. That means we can enjoy a fire in the cookstove even during the summer, and it will be easier to make cottage cheese, using about the same process as my mother used.

Otherwise, if it is too warm for a fire, I put the kettle on the electric stove at a very low temperature and work from there. And, when it is finished and in the bowl, I add salt. We sprinkle pepper on our own portions at the table. And, no cream. We like "dry" cottage cheese, though "dry" really isn't the right word. It is not wet with added liquid, but it is moist and has a silky texture. A dish of cottage cheese topped with rhubarb sauce is a good dessert or small meal. Like most homemade foods, it bears little resemblance to the commercial variety.