

Make butter the easy way

By Audrey Stallsmith

If your family is blessed with at least one dairy cow, there is no need for you ever to pay a cent for butter. You can “whip it up” yourself.

For those of you who are already shuddering at visions of your forefathers drooping over wooden churns, let me hasten to add that there is a modern way to make butter that is fast (less than half an hour), easy (no stamina required), and needs no special equipment beyond what you already have in your kitchen. Yes, modern butter-making is easy. (Almost too easy, as some friends of ours discovered when their bulk tank stopped cooling, but the big paddle continued to revolve.)

We begin, of course, with milk. Milk is made up of two components: skim milk and cream. Those two are divided respectively into curds and whey, butter and buttermilk.

We can leave the curds and whey to Little Miss Muffet, and proceed to the problem of separating the butter from the buttermilk. The key is *motion*. The Arabs did it by pouring cream into goatskin containers which they hung from their camels’ backs. The American pioneers suspended tightly covered pails of cream from the undercarriages of their wagons. (One can deduce that early modes of transportation were not exactly smooth-riding.) *But wait!* Before you try to coax the kids to take cream along on their pony rides, there is a better way.

If you have your own source of raw milk, collecting enough cream is simple: when raw milk is poured into pitchers, the cream rises to the top. Skim it off and keep it in a separate container in the refrigerator until you have about 1 to 1½ quarts. (If you wish to use store-bought cream, it should be at least 30% butterfat.) One

quart of cream will make about one pound of butter.

When you have enough heavy, cold, slightly sour cream, assemble your tools: an electric mixer and bowl, a spatula, a colander, a little salt, and a container in which to put the finished product.

Take the cream directly from the refrigerator and pour it into the mixing bowl. Turn the mixer on to medium speed. When the cream begins to thicken, turn to high. (The slower start will help prevent spattering.)

The cream will beat up very thick, like whipped cream, then begin to break down. When it starts to thin, turning yellowish and lumpy, and you can see milk beginning to separate from the lumps, turn the mixer down to medium speed again. When you begin to hear a slopping noise and see yellow pieces, turn it down to slow. When most of the milk is separated from the lumps, it is best to take the bowl off of the mixer and stir by hand until all the lumps form into one big lump.

You can then use a colander to drain the butter, placing a container underneath to catch the buttermilk. After the butter is drained, put it back in the mixing bowl and pour in one quart of cold water. Work the water through the butter with a spatula until all the butter is “washed.” Drain again. Squeeze out all remaining water with your hands or by pressing the butter against the side of the bowl with the spatula.

Sprinkle a scant tablespoonful of salt over the butter and work it in thoroughly. If you have one of the old wooden butter molds, you might want to put the butter in that. If not, press it

into whatever container you prefer. Store in the refrigerator until needed.

It should take about 20 minutes for the butter to “come.” Draining, washing, and salting probably won’t take more than 10 minutes—so about a half an hour is all the time required.

If the butter takes a much longer time to come and turns out runny, the cream was probably too warm. “Winter butter” will be a paler yellow than “summer butter,” from cows that are out on pasture. You can add a few drops of yellow food coloring if you wish.

Butter is, admittedly, one of those cholesterol foods. But my father assures me that, in his youth, they ate plenty of butter, cheeses, and fatty meats, and were all blissfully healthy. Of course, back then they got plenty of the right kinds of exercise—all those five-mile walks to school, hoeing entire fields of corn by hand, even making that butter the hard way. (*The good old days?*)

Ah, but they knew how to eat back then, too. And once you’ve tasted those whole wheat rolls steaming straight from the oven, golden with melting homemade butter, you’ll probably agree that those *were* the good old days. Of course, for that experience you’ll need to make your own bread, too, and that’s another story. Δ