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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 164 Homemade Cheese In An Hour Or Less

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/164](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/164)

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- Theresa: This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, Episode 164.
- Announcer: Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert Theresa Loe.
- Theresa: Okay, so I don't normally start the podcast episode like this, but I wanted to let you know that today's episode is an encore presentation. My team and I are working on a new project, and so we didn't want to just skip out on not delivering a podcast episode. We're delivering one of our very favorites with Claudia Lucero. It's all about cheesemaking, only it's about cheesemaking in less than an hour. You will love it, so that's why today's episode might sound a little bit different. It's an encore episode. I hope you enjoy it.
- Theresa: Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast. I'm your host, Theresa Loe, and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without the farm, and that can mean fermenting, preserving, small space food growing, and just taking small steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you're interested in any of these topics or my online Canning Academy, just visit my website [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com). This week's episode is all about making cheese at home, but not just any cheese: It's about making cheese in under an hour, really simple recipes that we can make at home if we are just learning to make cheese, or even if we have been making cheese for a long time.
- Theresa: I invited on Claudia Lucero, who is the author of One-Hour Cheese, and I couldn't be more excited about having her on the show. I have absolutely loved the book from the moment it came out about a year and a half ago. Now, if you don't know Claudia, she is a cheesemaker in Portland, Oregon, and she is the owner and creator of Urban Cheesecraft. Those are these little kits that you can buy online or even in places like Williams Sonoma that have everything in there

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for you to make all different kinds of cheeses. They're little DIY cheese kits, and each kit makes a different type of cheese.

Theresa: It has everything that you need except for the milk, so you buy the kit, you go out and get the milk, and then you can be well on your way to making your own cheese. Now, Claudia started making these DIY cheese kits back in 2009, and even today, she still teaches cheesemaking classes all across the country. One of her most recent projects, which I didn't even know about until we did this interview, is that she has a new kit coming out that is dairy-free, vegan, paleo cheese, and it's a kit to make that type of cheese. It will be coming out right around the time that this episode airs, so the timing couldn't be more perfect. In the interview, Claudia tells us all about this particular cheese kit, and so I'll let her give you all the description.

Theresa: I wanted to have Claudia on the show, because I find that diving into cheesemaking, a lot of people have the same fears or trepidations that they have with doing that versus canning and preserving or fermenting. If you go to research how to do it, it can be a little bit overwhelming, and can even be a little bit scary if you start worrying about safety issues. In my situation, I was lucky enough to grow up with a mom who learned how to make cheese and would make cheese at home, so I had someone to watch and to see how easy it is and how rewarding it can be.

Theresa: If you don't have that, then making cheese can definitely be a little bit scary, but Claudia's book and her kits take all the guess work out of it. And her book One-Hour Cheese is a fantastic introduction into making cheese, because no recipe in that book takes longer than an hour, and it doesn't matter if you're a beginner or not. Even if you have made cheese before, the book has so many fantastic recipes that are really quick and easy. You'll end up using these recipes to make all kinds of fresh cheese.

Theresa: Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "How in the world could we make a cheese in an hour? Doesn't it take months and months of aging to make cheese?" What this book is and what Claudia specializes in are fresh cheeses, so these are the kind of cheeses more like cream cheese or like a mozzarella cheese, something that you make and eat in the fresh state, unlike a hard cheese that has to age many many months or even years before it has the refined flavor that you're going for. By diving into these fresh cheeses, these one-hour cheeses, you get a really good handle on how cheese is made, the science behind it, and yet you still have a huge selection of different types of cheese to make. Then, if later you want to dive deeper and get into aging cheeses, you can absolutely do that once you have these cheeses under your belt, so it's a great starting point.

Theresa: Now, as Claudia talks to us, she's going to give a lot of information about cheesemaking, but she's also going to walk us through a really simple beginner recipe. I don't want you to worry about writing that down. I will have the entire recipe in the show notes for this episode, and you can go there and print it out when you're ready to make it. And I will have links to everything that Claudia has, her kits, her website and her book. Also, I will include a link to this really cute Etsy video that talks all about Claudia and her kits and what she does, and it's nice if you want to watch that to put a face to the voice that you'll be hearing. I'll have all of that in the show notes, and to get to the show notes, you just go to [livinghomegrown.com/164](http://livinghomegrown.com/164).

Theresa: Okay, I think you're really going to enjoy this interview, and you'll learn a lot, so let's just dive right into it. Here's my interview with Claudia Lucero from Urban Cheesecraft and the author of One-Hour Cheese.

Theresa: Hey, Claudia. Thank you so much for joining me here today.

Claudia: Thank you, Theresa. I'm so happy to be here.

Theresa: This is going to be a great topic for my listeners, because a lot of them are into eating locally. They care about what's in their food. A lot of them are into making everything, from their own yogurt to starting to can their own food and grow their own food, and I think cheesemaking is just the next step in this whole process, so I just am very, very excited about talking about this today, so thank you. To start out though, I would love for you to tell the audience just a little bit about yourself and how you got into cheesemaking.

Claudia: It's really interesting, because everything you just said was pretty much my inspiration, eating locally, eating seasonally, and it went along with a move from San Diego, California, where I grew up to Portland, Oregon. Getting here and suddenly being in a completely different climate and seeing different foods, and actually seeing more seasons and the availability of food really inspired me to see what I could find at those particular seasons. I moved here in December, and so you can just imagine not a lot was fresh and available.

Theresa: Right.

Claudia: Really, it did make me pause and think, "Okay, what is available now?" And so I had cabbages and collards and all that kind of stuff. I just started with sauerkraut and making things that would make me feel healthy during the winter and the rainy season. And then come spring, I joined a CSA. That's Community-Supported Agriculture, and usually what that means is you'll pay the farmer a larger sum in advance for a weekly basket of seasonal vegetables throughout the year. Then that started, and I really started getting familiar with what grows here in my local climate through the seasons.

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Claudia: And so, as I was getting a ton of green beans and a ton of beets, and these were things that I would buy once in awhile in San Diego, but here they became a mainstay because this is what I had paid for and this was an investment. It made me dive deeper into preserving and making the most out of everything that I was getting. Then, because of lacto-fermentation, you start looking into making yogurt, which is a cultured food. And then I started getting into butter and cultured butter, and just all started getting into cheese. All things lead to cheese it seems, so this was a really natural progression for me, really fun time of discovery. Then, once I got to stretching my own mozzarella and culturing my own goat cheese overnight, there was just no going back.

Theresa: That's really exciting, yes. It's something about mozzarella. I have a memory of my mom when she first learned to make cheese, and her and my dad both, they took a cheesemaking class. Watching them make the mozzarella was so exciting. I was probably ...

Claudia: That stretch, right?

Theresa: Yeah, I was probably eight years old, and I have such a memory of that, and the way it tasted and ... Yeah, it's amazing thing, and that people just don't do that anymore, and I love that people are turning back to that, and-

Claudia: Me too.

Theresa: Yeah.

Claudia: You're right. It really is this moment of awe where you think, "Wow, why haven't I done this earlier? You can really do this at home?" And just the flavor, it's like nothing ... No matter how fresh you get a cheese out at a shop, it's not going to be as good as what you make at home.

Theresa: Yeah, it's like the way a homegrown tomato is the most amazing thing, and even in-

Claudia: Precisely.

Theresa: Yeah, a Farmers' Market tomato is good, the next best thing, but homegrown is like the ultimate, and it is definitely that way with cheese.

Claudia: Right.

Theresa: Then you went on to ... You got into it. Then you went on and you created the Urban Cheesecraft business. Explain that.

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- Claudia: Right. As I was creating my first crude cheeses at home, which I thought were still amazing, because it's just that scientific moment. It seems so magical when you get curds and whey from this milk that you grew up with and just didn't think twice about really, and all of a sudden, you turn that gallon into some delicious cheese. I started sharing it with my co-workers, with neighbors, with friends and family, and everyone would ask, "How the heck did you make cheese," and "I had no idea you could do this." I would start telling them, "You go to this website to get this ingredient, and then you have to drive about an hour from here to the country to get this other ingredient, and then you got to find a farmer." Their eyes would just glaze over.
- Claudia: I thought, "Okay, this has got to be easier. I'm able to do this at home no problem. I've done all this research, I'm refining the recipes for just a one gallon pot versus five gallons or 25 gallons,' which some of the recipes I was starting with were meant for small farms and dairies and things like that, so now that I've done all this work, I thought, "Why don't I just put everything I've learned and all of these ingredients that I found myself into cute little boxes and put them on Etsy? Etsy is a handmade marketplace, and really starting up and gaining some ground."
- Claudia: This was in about 2008 when I was thinking about it, and so I thought, "What a great way to start a little business on there." I was always entrepreneurial. I had a lot of student loans, so a lot of motivation as I'm working at a nonprofit which I loved, but didn't pay much more than my monthly expenses. That was the beginning of it, friends interested, and then my idea for an Etsy shop, and then it just took off.
- Theresa: The boxes are really cute. They're still really cute, and you have several different cheeses, and I love that you even have the really good cheesecloth in the kit.
- Claudia: That's a must.
- Theresa: Yeah yeah, which we'll talk about as we get into the recipe, but what are some of the cheese kits that you have right now? I think they're even available on Williams Sonoma. I saw them one time.
- Claudia: Yes. They came to me I think about two, three years into my business and said, "We've tested a couple of cheese kits out there, and we love yours. We'd like to see if you could create a custom line for us." And so that was quite a ride. What a growth spurt and growing pains and a lot of exciting stuff. I never went to business school, so it was just trial by fire, and that was a really really good learning experience and just super fun collaboration. They chose some of my cheese kits, and then I made some that were just custom for them that included local Portland honey and lavender and rosemary, so they were interested in that kind of thing.

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- Claudia: Then, the ones that I make, I have burrata, mascarpone, of course the classic and favorite mozzarella, ricotta. Then I really like international foods. I'm Mexican, so I grew up with all these wonderful fresh Mexican cheeses, so I did a queso blanco, queso fresco for them, paneer which I love in curries. If you've never had it, it's a vegetarian protein and it's not fair to compare it to tofu, but it really does taste a little bit like it and behaves a little bit like it, but it's a hundred times better-tasting.
- Theresa: I'm going to have to try that, yeah. I have not, I've never made it.
- Claudia: It's so good.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Claudia: It's the easiest cheese you could possibly make, and I'm just always convincing people that if you've not made cheese, that's a great way to go.
- Theresa: Didn't you say it was your gateway cheese in your book?
- Claudia: It was, it was. Like I said, it's the easiest. I mean, you literally almost boil milk and pour in any kind of acid, whether that be a citric acid solution, some fresh lemon juice or some kind of vinegar, and it will just happen. Then, all you have to do is press it, and that really compresses it down to something that you can slice, and then you can fry it. You can put it in stews and curries. The neat thing about it is it doesn't melt. It's made in such a way and heated to such a temperature that the curd is really nice and tough, and so that's what I mean that you can use it like tofu or like chicken breasts instead in those dishes, because it won't disintegrate and melt. It just is this really delicious just protein alternative.
- Claudia: Let's see, did I cover all the cheeses? I think maybe goat cheese, I didn't mention. Then now, I even have dairy-free cheese kits, so I'm all over the place.
- Theresa: You are, you are. What is used for dairy-free cheese? If you're not using milk, what are you using?
- Claudia: Right, yeah. Interesting question the way that you said it, because the reason and the inspiration for these was that almost at every class or demonstration I would lead, someone in the audience or the class would ask, "Can I just replace the goat's milk or the cow's milk with almond milk or soy milk," and you just can't. Those milks don't have the protein and the calcium and everything in the quantities required for the rennet to do its job, for the citric acid to do its job, so I had to look at it from a whole other angle. What I've done is used actual nuts and seeds, mix up with water, yes. Then you blend those with water, and you can add fermented foods if you want a little bit more of a funky flavor.

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- Claudia: But even just a really simple cashew with a little bit of water in the blender makes a wonderful ricotta. To get that fat and that satisfying mouthfeel, you really do need the real food rather than just a watered-down milk. You can, there are alternatives that you can make with say a full fat coconut milk or something like that, but really the best results have been with nice soaked cashews, almonds, almond flour, macadamia nuts, pine nuts. You can really have a lot of fun with it just like you can with dairy cheese.
- Theresa: That is fascinating.
- Claudia: It is.
- Theresa: I had no idea.
- Claudia: Science is as exciting for me I think as dairy cheese.
- Theresa: Yeah, that is really awesome, because I know there's a lot of people who would be interested in that and in making something without milk, and so that's one of your kits that you have.
- Claudia: Yeah, two brand new kits, and I did a Kickstarter in order to fund these partly because I'd never done a Kickstarter, and I wanted to see what the hubbub was about to get something funded and get people behind the product before it was actually launched, but also because so many people requested it that I thought, "Let's see, let's see if this really is something that there's a demand and need for." I come from nonprofit and social work, and so I love solving a problem and filling a need. That's how I went about it, and so these new kits are going to be out in October, but I do have one already on my shop for mozzarella and ricotta. That was my test kit.
- Theresa: Okay, fantastic. This episode will be coming out in mid-October, so I'll be sure to link in the show notes to your kits, because I'm sure people will be interested in after hearing about it. Just hearing you talk about it made me hungry.
- Claudia: I think because I come from a cheesemaking perspective, from a traditional dairy cheesemaking perspective, my standards were higher, and that was one of the reasons I resisted doing this, even though it's been requested of me for so many years, is that the vegan cheeses that I saw on the market and that I tasted always left a lot to be desired. I thought, "If that's what it is, then that's not what I want to make," but I was really able to ... Sometimes, I would literally have a hunk of brie next to me as I was testing the cashew brie to try to get it as close as I possibly could in texture, in mouthfeel and richness, and that I think really makes a big difference.

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Theresa: I'm sure it does, and the fact that you knew exactly what it should taste and feel like, that I'm sure makes all the difference in your research and testing, so yeah. I'm excited about that. Okay, I will definitely link to that in the show notes.

Claudia: Okay, thank you.

Theresa: Yeah, okay. Let's dive into your book a little bit. I was so excited when I saw this book on the shelf, because a lot of people want to do cheesemaking, but they think it's a scary thing. What made you, first of all, want to write this book *One-House Cheese*?

Claudia: Along with putting the kits on Etsy, I started teaching classes here locally in Portland. What I noticed is the ones that were really popular were the ones where we would make cheese from beginning to end during that hour, hour and a half that the class was held in, and so I thought, "Huh, okay." Just kept that in my mind, and then people would ask me in the classes what books I would recommend, and I recommended a couple. There's some classics that have been around since the '70s that I learned from, but they were huge. There were maybe sometimes 250 cheeses in these books, and they weren't really organized in a way that would let a beginner know which ones to start with.

Claudia: I started making all these mental notes of, "If I were to write a book, what would it be like?" By the time that worked, when publishing came my way and asked if I would be interested, I already knew, "Okay, this is what I want. I want a lot of photos, because people come to these classes to see if things look the way they should, like 'Does the curd look right? Does the whey? Is this supposed to be more clear?'" All those little details that when you're nervous, they really make a difference. I wanted a lot of photos in there, and I wanted the cheeses to all be for beginners, and then it turned out that all of them were made in under an hour, so it just became this great complete book.

Theresa: Yeah, I think it makes people want to try it because they're like, "I've got an hour. I could give this a shot."

Claudia: Right, yeah.

Theresa: If someone wants to start making cheese, what would you say are some of the benefits? What are some of the reasons that people should want to make their own cheese at home?

Claudia: Yes, a lot of times, I hear other cheesemakers and cheese authors say, "It's not actually more economical," but that is if you age cheeses, because you lose so much moisture when you age. That's part of the aging process. The cheeses get dry and more concentrated, and they're wonderful, but it's very true. You start with a lot of milk, and end up with a very small amount of cheese in comparison.

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That's that part, but when you're making fresh cheeses and you're eating them as soon as you make them, and because we've made them in an hour, we haven't lost a lot of moisture, it is actually more economical. You can get a gallon of milk, and you're going to get almost two pounds of cheese. That's really a pretty good yield.

Theresa: Yes.

Claudia: That would be for simple cheeses like ricotta or paneer, and then the one that we're going to talk about today, fromage facile. That's one, more economical, and then one thing that I developed, and then that I started encouraging in my students is that, just like we were talking about vegetables, it connects you more to your local farmers, to what's going on with your food even at the grocery store. It starts getting you to read labels, because the less processed your milk is, the better your cheesemaking experience and the better tasting your cheese is going to be, and so you just suddenly become very interested in milk. I even tell people to call the 1-800 number on cartons, which most of us don't even know is there.

Claudia: I think the most exciting, and my favorite part of it, is that you can customize your cheeses to be any flavor, so at the store, you're going to get mozzarella, the classic white regular mozzarella. You might get a marinated mozzarella or something like that, but can you get a red pepper or cracked black pepper or chive or basil or oregano mozzarella? Not usually.

Theresa: No.

Claudia: When you make it, you can completely make it to your taste and make these beautiful flavored cheeses. That's my favorite part, the customization.

Theresa: Yeah, flavor is awesome. Flavor is the ultimate. Absolutely, okay.

Theresa: When someone's first looking at cheesemaking, I know it can be very similar to when someone's first looking at canning food. They have a little trepidation. They're wanting to start, but they might be a little bit nervous about it. Isn't that usually what is the biggest challenge for a beginner that they have a little bit of fear over it?

Claudia: Yes, and I do talk about this in my book in the beginning and just say, "Okay, get out of your head. Everything you've assumed about you have to have raw milk, and raw milk is going to kill you, and there's going to be mold everywhere, and you have to use bleach in your whole kitchen, none of that is true when you're first starting out and making these fresh cheeses." This is just as safe and it requires the same amount of cleanliness as making a pot of soup or pasta. You

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don't need to do any of that, because we're not aging. In aging, you have to control what kind of bacteria and mold is growing.

- Claudia: Here, we're not doing any of that. That's the first thing to let go of. You're not having to bleach your kitchen from head to toe. I just use hot water, vinegar, regular soap just like you would clean your kitchen normally. Then, the rest is just about following the recipes and starting out with some good quality supplies which we can talk about some more.
- Theresa: Sure, yes, and I think you're so true in that it's a big fear of the molds when you're aging. That makes sense, because when you're aging a cheese, there are certain cheese molds you want and certain things you don't want, and since there's always little spores in the air, that's why people get paranoid about it, but that's not what we're doing here. We're making fresh cheese, and then we're eating it right away, which is not a problem, because it tastes so good.
- Claudia: That's right, yeah. Yeah.
- Theresa: It goes really fast. Yeah, okay. Fantastic, so let's dive in to talking about the recipe. What's this beginner recipe that you like to share with people who are just starting?
- Claudia: Yes, I call this cheese fromage facile, and it's just my little tongue-in-cheek name because I want it to sound fancy, but really it just means "easy cheese" in French.
- Theresa: I love that.
- Claudia: Yeah see, and that's another perk. When you make your own cheese, you can just name it whatever you want.
- Theresa: Perfect, perfect.
- Claudia: Okay, fromage facile is a small batch, and so for beginners, it means it's going to be made actually in even about 25 minutes, so not even the whole hour. A quart of milk, whole cow's milk, and we want to, like I mentioned, get the best quality milk that we have, and if that just happens to be pasteurized grocery store whole milk, great. If you have a local farm or buying raw milk is legal in your state and you can find that, then great. You can do that as well. Usually in the book, I'll say when whole milk is best or maybe skimmed milk is a good idea, for example, with string cheese. In this case, it's whole milk.
- Theresa: Before you move on to the rest of the recipe, I want to just talk about milk for just a second, because you have a fantastic whole section in your book talking all about the different types of milk that we can get, and I know that there's a

big difference between pasteurized and ultra-pasteurized. Could you just talk for a second about what it is that we need to get, because if someone gets ultra-pasteurized, it won't work as well, correct?

Claudia: Correct, right. Okay, pasteurized milk is just the most common milk, but what started to happen is that companies have started to ultra-pasteurize. What that does is heats milk to such a temperature that it denatures the calcium and the protein, and it makes it a whole lot more difficult to get a curd, to get coagulation, that separation between curds and whey, and so I always say avoid ultra-pasteurized milk.

Claudia: If it is the only thing you have available to you, you might be able to get a very loose ricotta when you're trying to make a firm cheese, which is not a good result. I would just say avoid it if possible. Pasteurized, as I said, is the most common, and if you can access raw, which means it has not been pasteurized, it's pretty much just come out of the animal and has been strained and then bottled.

Theresa: Okay, perfect. And then, now organic if we can get it, organic is good, but just because it's organic does not mean that it hasn't been pasteurized or ultra-pasteurized, right?

Claudia: Very good point, and in fact, because organic milk is not yet to the point of selling more often than the regular milk, organic milk companies will more often ultra-pasteurize their milk, because they're trying to do that for a longer shelf life and long travel times across the US, and so it really is important to look for that label on the milk carton that just says, "Pasteurized."

Theresa: Okay, so this is where we learn how to read the carton or read the box or the carton or the bottle that it's coming in and look really carefully. We want ... Pasteurized is okay, ultra-pasteurized is what we want to avoid, and I know in my normal supermarket, most of the milks are ultra-pasteurized because they'll, like you said, last for a very long time on the shelf. Instead of 30 days, it's 60 or more days, I think.

Claudia: Right.

Theresa: And then the other thing that I wanted to ask you about though is about homogenized versus non-homogenized. Does that make a difference?

Claudia: Right. Not in these fresh cheeses. What that means is is the fat distributed throughout the entire carton of milk or is the fat up at the top resting like cream, like more old-fashioned milk? And so no, in this case, you can use either/or. A lot of the times, what I like to do if I get great quality milk is skim

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some of that cream and make some butter, which is why I included the recipe in the book as well.

Theresa: Yeah, oh good. Yeah, making your own butter is just an incredible experience as well. Okay, so we can get pasteurized or if it's organic, that's great. I really liked that you mentioned this in your book, that people can get confused when they see pastured milk. A pastured milk just means it's grass-fed, not that it's pasteurized.

Claudia: Yes yes, and it has taken my aback sometimes. When I started seeing the label of Pastured, it was a double-take where I thought, "Wait a second, what are they talking about?" But yeah, that's when they're actually allowed to go out on pasture and eat grass as cows should.

Theresa: Right, okay. Fantastic, so yeah. Just so everyone is aware, and you have this all spelled out beautifully in the book, so if they get the book, they will totally understand what they're looking for. Okay, let's get back to our recipe now. We're using just pasteurized milk is fine, and then ... We have one quart of pasteurized milk, or four cups. Then, what's the next thing that we need?

Claudia: The cup of cultured buttermilk, and in this case, we also want to avoid the ultra-pasteurized with any of the dairy in making cheese. Cultured buttermilk is typically low-fat milk that has bacteria cultures added so that it gets that tangy flavor like you get with yogurt. We're using it not only for flavor, but for that acidity, but then along with that, we're adding some lemon juice so that we get the additional acidity of the lemon juice without getting a strong lemon flavor.

Theresa: Okay.

Claudia: And then that's it. Simply after that, you just add salts to taste, and if you want to add some herbs, you can do that as well. You can do anything from herbs de Provence, just has a nice strong lavender flavor, or some fresh basil from your garden.

Theresa: Fantastic, okay. We have all of this milk and buttermilk and our lemon juice, and then do we need any special tools while we're making this other than a pot?

Claudia: Right, a standard pot that you have at home. If you're going to be making cheese often, I would say we need to avoid corrosive metals. A cast iron pot will not be good for this, same with uncoated aluminum pots. Avoid those two, but other than that, a standard stainless steel or enamel-coated pot, both of those are great. You don't really have to be too careful at this level of cheesemaking with having everything be glass and stainless steel as far as your measuring cups, measuring spoons and spoons, but it makes everything easier to wash and to clean.

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- Claudia: Then, the couple of things that I said that I include in the kits to make sure that people have success are the good quality cheesecloth. Sadly, what is called cheesecloth at most grocery stores is that really gauzy, super holey ... It's almost like gauze really.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Claudia: It's like you could be a mummy for Halloween, but you really need it much tighter, so if you're looking at a thread count for sheets, this is 90. You can go up as high as 120, I think I've seen it be, but you just really need to be able to catch tiny curds and let liquid go through, so any cloth that you have that you can clean and use for this purpose would work as long as you ...
- Theresa: Like a tea towel, a fresh clean tea towel would work if we didn't have the cheesecloth?
- Claudia: Right, that'd be great.
- Theresa: Okay, okay.
- Claudia: And then, a thermometer, it's a really basic thermometer, but you just need it to be consistent and to work. The most common measurement for a thermometer will be from zero degrees Fahrenheit to 220 degrees Fahrenheit, and we're going to work between those temperatures. Sometimes, you'll run into a candy thermometer that will jump in degrees by five or ten. That's not detailed enough, so you need the ticks to just be one or two.
- Theresa: Got it, okay.
- Claudia: And that's it.
- Theresa: Okay, so what do we do first?
- Claudia: Okay, you're going to put that milk in your pot. Turn it to about medium, and then just stay nearby. Remember, this cheese is going to be done beginning to end in about 20, 25 minutes, so it's not a passive process. You have to hang around the whole time, especially because we're going to heat the milk to 175, which is a good ... you're getting to simmer it, and you do that while stirring the bottom every once in awhile to make sure that the sugars, the lactose in the milk don't stick to the bottom of your pot, and then you're going to have a messy layer to clean up later.
- Claudia: Just simmer it calmly. Get it up to 175, and then you're going to pour in your cup of buttermilk, your two tablespoons of lemon juice, and you should instantly see a separation between curds and whey. Then, at that point, you just take the pot

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off the heat, turn off the heat, and you let it sit a few minutes, five, 10 minutes. I don't remember what I say in the recipe, but not very long. Yeah, just five minutes. In that time, that curd that has already separated just gets a chance to cook and release a little bit more of the whey, and that's going to give us the right texture.

Claudia: That's something that happens a lot with cheesemaking recipes is how long you let something rest or what temperature you go up to. All of that can really dictate how creamy or how firm your final cheese is. Once you learn that, you can use it to your advantage. In this case, you have a very tender curd, but once you let it sit for those five minutes, it gets slightly more firm because we want this final cheese to be almost the texture of a French cultured goat cheese, so a little creamy, but also a little crumbly.

Theresa: Got it, okay. This sounds really easy. Super super easy.

Claudia: Super easy.

Theresa: Yeah.

Claudia: Once it does sit for that time, you simply put it through your cheesecloth which you have lining a colander, and if you want to use the whey, which we can talk about really great uses for whey, which is the byproduct, the liquid, you place a bowl underneath that colander, and that way you'll catch that really nice clear whey. Then, the cheesecloth is going to catch your curd, and this is what's going to become your final cheese, and so you're letting the whey run out of the curd, keeping only the curd, and then the curd is what you're going to add salt and your herbs too. Just make sure that the curd isn't resting in the whey. You may need to lift it at some point and move the whey or bring in your other pot or something so that it's not resting there.

Claudia: It's a common thing that might happen is that colanders are shallow, and once you put them in that pot toward the end, they end up sitting in that whey. It's just a little detail that you'll very easily see if you're making it yourself. Once it's nice and dry, that's when you can add the salt, and salt at this level of cheesemaking is really just for flavor, but it does actually draw out some of that remaining final whey, because salt always draws moisture out of things, and so you really are salting to taste. In the recipe, I say to use a quarter teaspoon of flake salts. You can use sea salt, pickling salt, table salts even.

Claudia: And I say just a quarter teaspoon because then, what I do in the book is I make some fruit tarts, so it's going to be for a dessert, but if you were going to make this into say a bagel schmear kind of thing and you're going to add sun-dried tomatoes or pesto or something like that, you might want to add a little bit more salt. Again, you're making it for yourself, custom to your tastes.

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- Theresa: This would be killer on a bagel.
- Claudia: Yeah.
- Theresa: Really good.
- Claudia: It's such a versatile cheese. You can really go dessert or savory with it. You can stuff pasta shells. It's great.
- Theresa: This sounds really good. Okay, now back, I wanted to ask you a question. In case someone has never seen curds and whey, it's like a yellowy ... The whey part is a yellowy liquid, and it's almost like a curdling, right? Is that how you would describe it of the milk?
- Claudia: The separation, yeah. Sometimes people have seem this like if you put maybe ... I've seen it a lot with plant milks. If you put soy milk into hot coffee, it'll separate and it looks really awful.
- Theresa: Yes, yes.
- Claudia: Or it will look like cottage cheese floating in lemonade is what I like to tell people.
- Theresa: That's a good description, yes.
- Claudia: Yeah.
- Theresa: Okay, perfect. All right, yes. Yeah, really simple. We let it hang there so it's not sitting in the whey, and then do we mix in the ... If we want to mix in herbs, would we mix it in at that point?
- Claudia: Yeah, you can either take your nice drained curd out of the cheesecloth and put them in a bowl, or sometimes because I'm just being quick, I mix the salt right in to the colander, treating that as my bowl, and then I transfer it. Let's say that we take the curds out and transfer them into a bowl, and then this is when you can have fun with flavoring. Now, they should be really creamy, especially once you start stirring your salt in. That process really helps to get you the texture that we're after, because while curds are warm, they will want to stick together and shape to whatever vessel they're in. Say you just let them sit passively in a bowl while they're hot, you might pop those out and they might be in the shape of a bowl.
- Theresa: Right.

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Claudia: What we're doing as we're doing the salts and it's creaming the curd and getting it all salted really nice and evenly, but also really making the texture nice and creamy.

Theresa: Fantastic. Okay, then when we're all finished, how long would be be able to keep this? How long would it last?

Claudia: About a week.

Theresa: About a week?

Claudia: Yeah, about a week. These fresh cheeses, because they have so much moisture in them, they are really for a week's worth of use.

Theresa: Okay, and this would be a good amount for a week. You'd probably be just right. You'd eat that up with your family, and then you could make another batch.

Claudia: Right, the really great thing is you can, for most of these recipes, quadruple them or cut them in half. You can really customize them.

Theresa: Okay, fantastic. All right. Now one of the things I know from reading your book is that most cheeses, or maybe all cheeses, need to have an acid. In this case, we were using buttermilk and the lemon juice as our acid to make the separation and create the cheese, but I know that we can also use citric acid sometimes when we're making cheese, and that's something that a lot of my listeners would probably have on their pantry shelf because they're canners, so is there a way that we can use the citric acid to make cheeses sometimes?

Claudia: Absolutely, and in fact, it's what I include in my kit so that it's a non-perishable acid that I can include in there. I do actually like citric acid, because it has such a neutral flavor. You can use lemon juice, lime juice and vinegars, but they will all add their own nuanced flavor, which can be good. You can often go for that on purpose, but citric acid will always just give it the acidity that we need with the neutral flavor.

Claudia: For example, with this recipe, to replace some of the acidity that we're getting with the buttermilk and with the lemon juice, I would dissolve one teaspoon of the citric acid in about a quarter teaspoon of water. Then, at that point when we get to the 175 temperature, drizzle it in, and as soon as you see a separation, stop drizzling. You may not need the whole solution.

Theresa: Okay, so we can eyeball it?

Claudia: Exactly.

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- Theresa: Okay, fantastic. That's cool. They'll be able to use the citric acid sitting on their shelf, and that would make it even more fun.
- Claudia: Yeah.
- Theresa: Okay, one other question I had, I was thinking as we were talking about making a non-dairy cheese, I know one thing that a lot of people, when they're making cheese, would have to use a rennet. I think you use a rennet in your mozzarella kit, but you say in your book that you stick to a vegetarian rennet, and I thought that was really important to note. I'd love for you to tell everyone what rennet is, and how vegetarian rennet is different from the standard rennet so that if they're at all squeamish about rennet, they would still want to use your book, because most of the recipes I don't even think have any rennet, but if they did, you recommend a vegetarian. Could you explain that?
- Claudia: Right, sure. The cheeses in my book that would need rennet are things like the mozzarella, burrata, the pepper jack, the string cheese, so you can see the trend there. It's the melty, more rubbery cheeses, whereas ricotta for example or queso fresco or something like that is a little bit more crumbly and doesn't melt. That's what we get from it, and it works along with the acid to reorganize the proteins in order to be able to melt and be gooey.
- Claudia: Let's see. Your other question was, okay, because it's vegetarian. Just how this started is not only have I been vegetarian for several years and in the past, but I have a lot of friends who are vegetarian. Even though I'm not anymore, if I hosted parties with them or I gave cheese as a gift, I wanted everybody to be able to eat the cheese, and so I didn't want to worry about, "This one has the animal rennet, and this one has the vegetarian." I just knew that if I added vegetarian rennet, then everyone could eat it. Then I've also had a lot of customers who are kosher and eat that way ask about that, and so that's another diet that it's important for. The other reason I really like these tablets is that they don't expire as quickly as animal rennet does.
- Claudia: Animal rennet maybe will last to six months in the refrigerator. These tablets, they're powder and you keep them in the freezer, will last up to five years. I found that when people are beginners, that you may need some time. It may only be a year, but that's much better than six months and just being like, "Oh shoot, I never got to it. I wasted my money."
- Theresa: Yeah, and sometimes it's hard to find these ingredients.
- Claudia: Right.
- Theresa: The difference between animal rennet and a vegetarian rennet, animal rennet is actually from the lining of a small cow or ...

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- Claudia: Yes, an unweaned calf. In the fourth stomach, they have these enzymes that help them digest their own mother's milk, and that's why it has to be unweaned, because eventually they don't drink milk anymore. They go to grass, and so it's only when they're unweaned that they have these enzymes. As humans long ago, we figured out that if we took the stomach, and sorry if people are squeamish, but really I think it's respectful if you're going to be using an animal to use all of it, and so that's what our ancestors did. They dry it and they grind it up and put it in a little liquid so that it's almost like a tincture.
- Claudia: Then you just need a drop or two of this liquid, and it's amazing how these enzymes can do that to milk. Also, humans are smart and we figured out that plants can do this as well, and so vegetarian rennet is from a strain of fungi, so related to the mushrooms, and so that was turned into a power and then pressed into these tablets that you can score and just use a quarter of, and makes it very easy to do.
- Theresa: Yeah, that's what's so awesome about the vegetarian rennet because a lot of people who are vegetarian or are learning to be vegetarian may not realize that that's what rennet is, standard animal rennet, so being able to find a vegetarian cheese is that they would not have used the animal to create the cheese and other than the milk if it's a milk.
- Claudia: Right, like you said, that's another benefit of making cheese at home. That's another decision that you can make for yourself.
- Theresa: Right. You can make that decision and if it's something that is very important to you, you can make sure that any cheese in your house is vegetarian rennet and you don't have to worry about any animals being harmed in the process which I know is very important to a lot of people and a lot of people don't even know that that's how rennet is made.
- Claudia: Right, that's true. Yeah.
- Theresa: Yeah. When I've had this conversation with people who it would matter to, they're absolutely floored to find out that that's what animal rennet is. That's why I wanted to bring it up because you talk about that in your book and all of your kits used the vegetarian rennet, so if anyone buys a mozzarella kit from you, they are using vegetarian rennet in that kit, and I think that's really important to know.
- Claudia: That's right.
- Theresa: Claudia, thank you so much. This has just been fantastic. I'm going to include all the information in the show notes for this episode and everyone will be able to know how to get your kits, and the book, and everything else. I just really



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appreciate you taking the time to share all this information. I think everybody will really enjoy it.

Claudia: It was so fun to share. Thank you for having me.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that encore presentation of One-Hour Cheese with Claudia Lucero. Now, everything that we talked about, including a PDF that you can print out with her recipe and information on her website, her cheesemaking kits and her books, just go to [livinghomegrown.com/164](http://livinghomegrown.com/164) and everything will be right there for you. Thank you so much for joining me on today's encore presentation, and until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com) to download Theresa's free canning resource guide, and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown Podcast.