

The Six Steps of Cheesemaking

1. **Acidification:** Starter culture is added to milk to change lactose (milk sugar) into lactic acid. This process changes the acidity level of the milk and begins the process of turning milk from a liquid into a solid.
2. **Coagulation:** Rennet is added to further encourage the milk to solidify.
3. **Curds and Whey:** Curds are cut using a knife or a tool that resembles a rake. Cutting the curds further encourages them to expel liquid or whey. Generally, the smaller the curds are cut, the harder the resulting cheese will be. Soft cheeses like Camembert or Brie are hardly cut at all. Harder cheeses like Cheddar and Gruyere are cut into a very fine texture. For these harder cheeses, the curds are further manipulated by cheddaring and/or cooking. Cooking the curd changes its texture, making it tender rather than crumbly.
4. **Salting:** Salt adds flavor and also acts as a preservative so the cheese does not spoil during long months or years of aging also helps a natural rind to form on the cheese. There are several ways to use salt. Salt can be added directly into the curd as the cheese is being made. The outside of the wheel of cheese can be rubbed with salt or with a damp cloth that has been soaked in brine. The cheese can also be bathed directly in vat of brine.
5. **Shaping:** The cheese is put into a basket or a mold to form it into a specific shape. During this process, the cheese is also pressed with weights or a machine to expel any remaining liquid.
6. **Ripening:** Referred to as *affinage*, this process ages cheese until it reaches optimal ripeness. During this process, the temperature and humidity of the cave or room where the cheese ages is closely monitored. An experienced *affineur* knows how to properly treat each cheese so it develops the proper flavor and texture. For some cheeses, ambient molds in the air give the cheese a distinct flavor. For others, mold is introduced by spraying it on the cheese (brie) or injecting it into the cheese (blue cheese). Some cheeses must be turned, some must be brushed with oil, and some must be washed with brine or alcohol.