

MASTER CLASS

DIY YOGURT

Make your own and use it to transform your cooking.

By Elaine Johnson

“YOU’LL NEVER HAVE fresher yogurt than the yogurt you make yourself,” says Janet Fletcher, author of *Yogurt, Sweet and Savory Recipes for Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner* (Ten Speed Press). The author of more than two dozen cookbooks, Fletcher has made great ingredients her focus ever since her time as a cook at Chez Panisse years ago. Yogurt, she says, “fits in with my dairy obsession.”

By culturing your own yogurt, she explains, you can control its richness, tang, and texture. And the process is just plain fun: “It’s like magic,” she says. “Milk goes in and yogurt comes out.” Fletcher calls herself a “yogurt purist,” forgoing any sugar or flavoring and using only whole milk for a rich, buttery full flavor.

That luscious style of yogurt isn’t just delicious by the spoonful—it lends itself to all kinds of cooking too. Fletcher showed us how to use yogurt at different thicknesses to create a soup, an appetizer spread, and a topping for chicken, all with her vibrant California spin.



Culturing your own yogurt requires just a little hands-on time, as Janet Fletcher demonstrates in her Napa kitchen.

What you need



The culturing process (detailed on page 104) takes 5 to 12 hours—and the following ingredients and tools.

MILK Any fat level works, but Fletcher prefers whole milk for the way its creaminess balances yogurt’s tang. Open just before using.

NONFAT DRY MILK Adding a little creates thicker, more stable yogurt.

“STARTER YOGURT” This will convert milk sugar (lactose) to lactic

acid. Use plain yogurt (ideally whole-milk) with “live cultures” on the ingredient list; open just before using. You can save some of your own yogurt to culture the next batch if you make it at least once a week.

THERMOMETER Fletcher likes the instant-read Super-Fast Thermopen (\$96; thermoworks.com); or use

a clip-on candy thermometer.

JAR Use a clean wide-mouth quart or liter canning jar for culturing.

A WARMER Have blankets or an electric warmer, such as Brod & Taylor Folding Proofer (\$148; brodandtaylor.com), on hand to keep yogurt warm while it cultures.



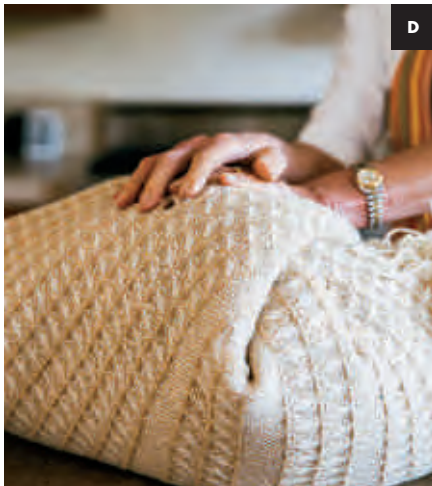
A



B



C



D

THICK and CREAMY YOGURT

MAKES 1 QT. / 35 MINUTES, PLUS 5 TO 12 HOURS TO CULTURE AND 1½ HOURS TO CHILL

To create a satiny yogurt, Fletcher uses whole milk, adds dry milk to boost the protein, and heats it before culturing.

- 1 qt. whole milk
- 2 tbsp. instant nonfat dry milk
- 2 tbsp. plain whole-milk yogurt with active live cultures, at room temperature

1. Pour hot tap water into a clean wide-mouth 1-qt. canning jar and set aside.
2. Whisk together whole milk and dry milk in a medium saucepan [A]. Heat over medium heat, whisking often, until milk reaches 195° on an instant-read thermometer. Adjust heat to keep milk at 195° and cook, whisking often, 10 minutes. After heating, **“you’re going to have a thicker, more stable curd,”** Fletcher explains. Remove from heat.
3. Set pan in a sink of ice and water and cool to 115° [B]. **“The milk cools fast, so keep checking it. If it goes too low, just reheat it.”** (But don’t let it go above 118°, or it will kill the yogurt.)
4. Put yogurt in a small bowl and whisk in about 1 cup hot milk [C] to temper it and thin it out, then whisk this back into milk in pan. Transfer milk to a container with a spout. Drain hot water from jar and add hot milk mixture. Put lid on jar.
5. Incubate yogurt [D]. **“I wrap it in a kitchen towel so it doesn’t get my blankets dirty, then set the jar in a blanket nest.”** Fold a small blanket or beach towel in quarters, set on a counter, and fold sides up over yogurt. Snugly tuck 2 more folded blankets around the outside. Let yogurt sit undisturbed in a draft-free place 5 hours.
6. Unwrap and tilt jar gently to check if yogurt is set. **“It should be like a baked custard.”** If not, rewrap and check in another 1 to 2 hours (it may take up to

12 hours total). The longer it cultures, the tarter it will taste. You may also get liquid—the whey—forming around the curd. **“I like it mellow, so I try to stop it as soon as it’s set.”**

7. Chill completely (1½ hours) before serving for yogurt to firm up; otherwise, it will be too fragile.

MAKE AHEAD Keeps 1 week, chilled.

PER CUP 161 Cal., 46% (74 Cal.) from fat; 8.7 g protein; 8.2 g fat (4.7 g sat.); 13 g carbo (0 g fiber); 120 mg sodium; 26 mg chol. GF/LC/LS/V

GREEK-STYLE YOGURT

1½ TO 3 CUPS (FROM 1 QT. YOGURT) / 1 TO 2½ HOURS

For a more voluptuous texture, Fletcher drains **Thick and Creamy Yogurt** to release some of the liquid (whey). Line a strainer with a double thickness of regular or synthetic cheesecloth (like reusable Plyban, \$14 for 20 sheets; getculture.com). Set strainer over a bowl and add 1 qt. yogurt (or less). Cover and chill. Let drain 1 to 2½ hours, depending on how thick you like it. Serve with fruit or use it in recipes, such as the chicken on page 106.

YOGURT CHEESE (LABNE)

1½ CUPS (FROM 1 QT. YOGURT) / 1 DAY

Drain **Thick and Creamy Yogurt** the same way as for Greek-Style Yogurt, extending the time to about 24 hours, until spreadable, stirring in ½ tsp. kosher salt per qt. yogurt after 2 hours (it’s easier to incorporate before the yogurt gets thick). Flavor with garlic, herbs, or roasted peppers and serve as a dip or spread.

S DIGITAL BONUS Watch the Thick and Creamy Yogurt come together: sunset.com/yogurtvideo.



CHILLED AVOCADO and YOGURT SOUP

SERVES 4 (MAKES 1 QT.) / 20 MINUTES, PLUS 30 MINUTES TO CHILL

This fresh Greek-inspired soup comes together in minutes. Buttermilk gives it a soupy consistency without changing the yogurt's flavor.

2 large firm-ripe avocados
 1½ cups each buttermilk and Thick and Creamy Yogurt (opposite; or store-bought plain whole-milk yogurt)
 ¼ cup chopped fresh dill
 2 tbsp. coarsely chopped fresh mint, plus small mint leaves or sprigs
 1 large garlic clove, thinly sliced
 ½ jalapeño chile, seeded (or leave in seeds if you like heat)
 About 1½ tbsp. lemon juice
 About 1 tsp. kosher or sea salt
 3 radishes
 Chunk of feta cheese

1. Halve, pit, and peel avocados and set aside 1 half. Coarsely chop remaining avocados. In a blender, whirl buttermilk,

yogurt, chopped avocados, dill, chopped mint, garlic, and chile until smooth.

2. Pour soup into a bowl. If you'd like it thinner, stir in about ¼ cup cold water. Stir in 1½ tsp. lemon juice and 1 tsp. salt. Chill until very cold, 30 minutes. **"It's supposed to be refreshing, like chilled borscht or gazpacho,"** Fletcher says.
3. Coarsely shred radishes. Cut reserved half avocado into small dice and sprinkle with a little salt and lemon juice.
4. Taste soup and add more lemon juice or salt if you like. Ladle into bowls. Place a tuft of radishes and a small spoonful of avocado in center of each serving. Grate a little feta over soup and top with mint leaves. Serve immediately (toppings will sink).



YOGURT CHEESE with ROASTED BEETS and FETA

SERVES 6 / 1½ HOURS

This ultra-creamy, Middle Eastern-style appetizer dip is also excellent with raw cucumbers, says Fletcher.

Peel 1½ lbs. **roasted beets** (half golden and half red), slice, and put in separate bowls. In a small bowl, whisk 2 tsp. **red wine vinegar** with 2 tbsp. **extra-virgin olive oil**, 2 minced **garlic cloves**, ¼ tsp. **kosher salt**, and ¾ tsp. **fennel seeds**, lightly toasted and ground. Add enough vinaigrette to each bowl of beets to coat. Combine 1½ cups **Yogurt Cheese (Labne)**, homemade (opposite) or store-bought, with 2 minced **garlic cloves**, ½ tsp. **kosher salt**, and 2 tsp. more **oil**. Spread yogurt cheese on a platter and scatter ⅓ cup crumbled **feta cheese** on top. Drizzle generously with more **oil**. Sprinkle with **roasted, salted pumpkin seeds** and arrange beets next to yogurt cheese. Sprinkle everything with **zaatar*** (a Middle Eastern spice blend) and **Aleppo pepper*** or hot paprika. Serve with **pita bread**. *Find at well-stocked grocery stores and worldspice.com.

PER CUP 246 Cal., 63% (155 Cal.) from fat; 8.2 g protein; 17 g fat (4.1 g sat.); 18 g carbo (6.1 g fiber); 531 mg sodium; 13 mg chol. GF/LC/V

HARISSA-ROASTED CHICKEN with CHICKPEAS

SERVES 6 / 1 HOUR, PLUS 4 HOURS TO MARINATE

Tangy yogurt meets bold harissa in the topping for this gutsy chicken dish. Fletcher adapted the recipe from one by her friend Ed Blonz, author of the syndicated column On Nutrition.

½ cup plain whole-milk Greek-style yogurt, homemade (see page 104) or store-bought

About ⅓ cup coarse harissa* from a jar, such as Les Moulins Mahloub brand

1 tbsp. lemon juice

About 1 tsp. kosher or sea salt

Pepper

6 large bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (2 lbs. total)

1 can (15 oz.) chickpeas, drained and rinsed

1 large red onion, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced into half-moons

1 lb. carrots, peeled and sliced on the diagonal about ¼ in. thick

About ⅓ cup coarsely chopped cilantro

1. In a bowl, whisk yogurt, harissa, lemon juice, 1 tsp. salt, and several grinds of pepper. Add chicken; turn to coat. **"It's a little dry to start, but there's plenty of fat that comes out of the chicken,"** Fletcher notes. Chill, covered, 4 to 8 hours. **"The acid in the yogurt helps tenderize the meat."** Remove from refrigerator 30 minutes before cooking.
2. Preheat oven to 425° with a rack set in upper third. In a bowl, combine chickpeas, onion, and carrots. Season lightly with salt and toss to blend. Make a bed of the vegetables in a 9- by 13-in. baking dish. With a rubber spatula, redistribute marinade so it evenly covers both sides of chicken. Set chicken on vegetables, skin side up. Bake until chicken is deeply browned, about 45 minutes.



- "It should even be charred in spots."**
3. Transfer chicken to a plate. Stir vegetables and add a splash of water if they look dry. Bake until carrots are tender, 10 minutes longer. Stir in ⅓ cup cilantro.
 4. To serve, set chicken on vegetables and sprinkle with a little more cilantro.

*Find harissa, a Tunisian chile-and-spice paste, at well-stocked grocery stores. 🍴

PER SERVING 264 Cal., 34% (89 Cal.) from fat; 22 g protein; 9.9 g fat (2.8 g sat.); 17 g carbo (4.2 g fiber); 449 mg sodium; 68 mg chol. LC/LS

"Greek yogurt makes a nice clingy coating with the harissa."

TIP