

Making yoghurt at home

Yoghurt is a favourite dairy food - and with good reason. Nutritious, a great source of calcium, low in fat and available in a huge range of flavours, yoghurt is great for the whole family! Soft, smooth yoghurt is made when two particular bacterial cultures are added to milk at a constant lukewarm temperature. Family members who are lactose intolerant are able to enjoy yoghurt as the lactose is broken down by the bacteria.

Did you know yoghurt is easy to make at home?

There are several different ways to make yoghurt - from using an ordinary wide mouth thermos, to using yoghurt starter kits (from supermarkets), or electric yoghurt makers (available from department stores).

To make yoghurt, warm one litre of fresh (pasteurised), UHT (long-life) or soy milk in a saucepan. Thoroughly stir in ¼ cup of milk powder and bring gently to the boil. Remove from heat and allow to cool until lukewarm (about 45°C). If using a thermos, ensure it is airtight and pre-warmed. Put two tablespoons of fresh commercial natural yoghurt in thermos base and mix in the milk mixture. Commercial yoghurt is used because it contains the two essential bacterial strains needed to start the yoghurt reaction.

Screw the lid of the thermos on tight and put in a warm place (wrapping in a towel will help to keep the temperature constant). Leave for at least six hours - do not to move the thermos at all during this time otherwise the delicate yoghurt curd will be disturbed. Using a yoghurt maker can help to guarantee perfect yoghurt every time because keeps the mixture airtight and at a constant temperature, but I find that if you are careful a thermos will do the job.

To get a thicker yoghurt with a stronger taste, leave the mixture incubating for longer (up to 12 hours). Once made, store the yoghurt in the fridge - it will keep for two to three days. It is important to make sure all equipment is washed thoroughly and sterilised in boiling water to prevent any undesirable bacteria from growing in the incubated milk.

Experiment with flavours

Flavours can be added to the yoghurt after it has been chilled, try adding:

- whole fruit jam
- fresh fruit eg mashed banana, grated pear
- tinned fruit, well-drained and mashed
- honey and desiccated coconut
- cinnamon spice or vanilla essence and sugar to taste

Fresh or tinned fruit can sometimes make the yoghurt watery. To overcome this, either add the fruit just before serving or thicken with gelatine.

Yoghurt is very versatile - great on its own or with a dessert, fantastic as an ingredient for drinks, sweets and savoury dishes, and it even makes the perfect base for dips,

dressings and sauces. By making yoghurt at home you will never be caught without it again!