

How-To Make Plain Yogurt (Part 1) and How-To Make Greek Yogurt (Part 2)

by Marcella Bothwell



PLAIN YOGURT

GREEK YOGURT

1. The first time I tried to make yogurt, I failed. During the pandemic I bought fancy kitchen gadgets bought a starter online.
 - a. First, gadgets are not the problem, but I learned a simple stovetop method instead.
 - b. Second, you need a good starter (blend of bacteria which consume the milk sugar, Lactose. Different bacteria mixtures give it the tangy taste from lactic acid conversion.
 - i. Store bought – make sure it says, “live culture” and a smaller container of 8 oz because I think there is a larger turnover of the product.
 - ii. I got my first successful starter from my Greek friend at Zgara cafe on Morena Blvd. who got me to try making yogurt again.
 - iii. Use your own yogurt once you have some!
2. Heating the milk
 - a. Heating the milk, ensures only the bacteria you put in or “culture” grows.
 - b. The protein in the milk’s lactoglobulin denatures i.e., opens up and makes the yogurt texture. Different temperatures will make different consistencies of yogurt.
 - c. What kind of milk?
 - i. I use whole milk, but you can use 2%. Non-dairy milks can also be used but not to make Greek yogurt. The fat in the milk gives it a smoother texture. You will also have different textures but give it a try.
 - d. How hot do I get the milk and how long do I keep the temperature?



- i. My first success was Nick's method from Zgara, the old Greek method. Heat the milk to almost boiling and then turn off the heat. Let the milk cool until you can comfortably put your finger in it then add the starter. I was used to this because this is how I treat my yeast when I add warm water to my yeast to make bread. You just don't want it to be too hot to kill the yeast but nice and warm to make them comfortable to wake up and party to rise the bread.
- ii. Digital thermometers help as I have gotten geekier. Besides it's hard to wait for milk to boil. The boiling temp at sea level for milk is 212.9F or slightly above water at 212F. In San Diego, I thought we essentially were at sea level but mine starts to boil a little earlier at 185F depending on the day. According the "Science of Great Yogurt" referenced above to make creamy yogurt you should keep the milk at 195F for 10 minutes for thicker and milder yogurt. In the video it boiled around 185-190 so I kept the temperature about there for 10 minutes.
- iii. Ten minutes gives the lactoglobulin time to denature and evaporation contributes to the thickening.

3. Adding the starter

- a. Temperature to add starter is between 105 – 120F or as Nick said, when you put your finger in it and its just warm.
- b. I get about a ¼ cup or dipping cup's worth of starter from Zgara or I use my own yogurt from my last batch.
- c. Stir and distribute throughout the warm milk. Cover.

4. Setting or Culturing

- a. My first success was, and I am being truthful, setting the pot outside with the sun and blankets around it and waiting for 4 hours. I was excited and shocked when, oh my, I had yogurt when I opened the lid. It can't be that easy. Now with this method you have to worry about how hot the day is, timing in the afternoon, blankets, portable heater, etc. I did it again and it didn't work so well. So, I thought, I'll use my oven which has a bread proofer button. I put the liquid failed mixture in the proofer overnight 95F overnight and in the morning, Yogurt! And no one got sick from the overnight setting.
- b. Now, the 4-hour proofing in the oven seems the most efficient and consistent. But remember varying it can make different types of yogurts so experiment. The website referenced suggests 90F, but I can't make my oven drop the temperature, but I think it's certainly more consistent that my sun and blanket method. If it hasn't set, leave it a little longer.



- c. Websites also recommend “Proofers” which I looked at but were fairly expensive.
 - d. Don’t disturb the yogurt in its culturing process.
5. Storing
- a. I then just transfer to a large container or multiple smaller containers and chill the yogurt. It can be stored refrigerated for up to a month but mine doesn’t last that long.
6. Adding fruit or honey OR proceed on to make Greek yogurt
- a. Now you can add what you want to make it delicious.
7. Moving on to make Greek yogurt
- a. Strain yogurt before chilling through a ‘GRADE 100’ cheese cloth. I got mine on Amazon for a little over 5\$. The video uses 20 x 20 inches, but I only strained about half of the starting mixture. I also have bought the 1x1 yard size which you can cut down. You need to have something to elevate your yogurt bag to collect the liquid at the bottom and be small enough to fit into refrigerator.
8. Why make your own yogurt
- a. It’s fun.
 - b. To control the ingredients and not have additives (ultra-processed).
 - c. To use different types of milk (fat content, protein content, plant based).
 - d. To change the taste and texture as you want to or reduce lactose as needed.
9. References
- a. For more details go to: <https://brodandtaylor.com/blogs/recipes/the-science-of-great-yogurt>
 - b. <https://www.facebook.com/people/ZGARA-Greek-Grill/100063481032573/>

