

Lebanese White Cheese, Jibin

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

Jibin, also known as Jibneh Arabieh, is fresh cheese with an open texture, similar to Greek feta. Typically eaten for breakfast, jibin is a delicate counterpoint to olives and delicious eaten with tomatoes, cucumber, mint, and flatbread. The flavor of jibin is always as good as the milk used to make it. Store the cheese in brine and eat within a week or so of making it. Makes about 4 5-inch patties. The recipe can be doubled easily.

½ gallon whole milk

1 tablet rennet

Juice of half of a large lemon

Kosher salt

In a large stainless steel (not aluminum) pot, warm the milk to 90 degrees, or lukewarm. Remove from the heat.

Crush the rennet with a mortar and pestle (or a makeshift one; the handle end of a large knife or spoon in a small bowl works well). Add 2 tablespoons cold water to the rennet and stir to dissolve completely.

Gently stir the rennet mixture into the milk. Add the lemon juice and gently combine. Within a few minutes you should begin to see small pools of a yellow liquid forming in the milk. This is the whey separating from the curd. If the separation doesn't appear to be happening, add more lemon juice.

Cover the pot and let it rest, undisturbed, in a warm spot for about an hour, or until a soft yogurt-like curd block has formed. There will be a separation around the edge of the pan where the formation of the curd is most evident.

Break up the curd (into the whey) with a whisk into pea-sized pieces that resemble cottage cheese. Let it rest in the pan to settle for 30 minutes.

Line a colander with a single layer of ultra-fine cheesecloth. Pour the curd into the colander (the curd will seem very wet and not particularly separate from the whey at this point; don't worry, the whey will drain off and the curds will be evident). Drain the curds for about an hour, stirring regularly to be sure the whey drains evenly.

Line a sheet pan with white paper towel. Lightly salt the curds with a tablespoon of salt, stirring completely. Scoop a large handful of the curd and use both hands to shape the cheese into a round or oblong patty about 2 inches thick at the center, pressing out excess whey as you go.

Place the patties on the lined sheet pan and lightly cover with more paper towel. Refrigerate overnight.

To store the jibin, place whole or cut up patties in a jar and cover with brine (1 cup warm water to 2 tablespoons kosher salt; bring to room temperature or chill before covering the cheese with it).