

The Goodness of Curd

Enku looks into the making of this delicious dessert.

Photos by Suresh De Silva



Nothing can match buffalo curd and treacle for its taste and nutritional value.

If you're lucky enough to be invited to a meal in a Sri Lankan home, the treat you'll be offered for dessert will probably be curd and treacle. Curd looks like yoghurt and the treacle is akin to maple syrup, but tastier. You'll find curd and treacle both delicious and moreish. But there is more to curd than titillates the taste-buds. Different preparations derived from milk, such as yoghurt, cheese, butter, ghee and cream contain nutrients essential for life and no food on earth can take the place of milk. Milk can be obtained from cow, goat, yak, camel and in Sri Lanka, from buffalo. Curd comes from buffalo. Before you squirm, remember that neither fruit, ice-cream nor fancy soufflé can match buffalo curd and treacle for its taste and nutritional value.

Sri Lanka's best curd comes from the South: Galle, Matara and Ambalangoda

district. You can buy a clay pot with enough for three people for around Rs 1 ; good value for money when compared with the cost of a small tub of bland yoghurt. Making curd is a cottage industry in the south. The popular way of producing it is to boil the buffalo milk and then let it cool to a lukewarm temperature. A souring agent, such as a knob of previously made curd, is added. The mixture is allowed to set in a clay pot for up to 24 hours. The curd is then ready for consumption. When an acquaintance of mine asked me whether the clay pot in which the curd is made is first swilled with buffalo urine, my reaction was one of utter disgust. To my surprise, he was right, as I discovered from the Medical Research Institute. In olden days, folk in the south where there are plenty of buffalo, did in fact swill the claypot with urine first. The modern explanation for this seemingly odd practice is that urea increases the specific gravity of the curd, thereby thickening it. The updated version of this method is to add urea for the same purpose. This adulteration, you must bear in mind, is not at all harmful to health since urea is one of the essential minerals found in, and excreted by, the human body. Don't let it put you off curd. But if it does, you could obtain buffalo curd from the National Milk Board outlets cooperative wholesale establishments (CWE) and reputed supermarkets in Kandy and Colombo where the curd is hygienically prepared and urea-free.

The National Milk Board and other large reputed milk collecting centres rely on private dairy farms for their regular supply of buffalo milk. Food analysts measure the specific gravity of the collected milk to verify its purity. If you are seeking genuine curd, it is not always advisable to buy from street vendors as there is a likelihood that the curd could have been adulterated with powdered milk. While that won't be injurious to your health, you wouldn't be getting authentic buffalo curd.



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Curd can also be prepared from cow's milk. It is mostly home-made and costs more than buffalo curd. It is softer in consistency and tastes less sour. The nutritional value of buffalo milk curd is as good as curd made from cow's milk. But buffalo milk's fat content is higher than cow's, so weight-watcher and those watching their cholesterol intake should not over indulge.

Another difference in the curd from cow and buffalo is in its lactic acid properties.

Cow's curd should be eaten within a day of its preparation: buffalo curd can keep for two days without refrigeration. One tip to remember when eating curd is not to round off the meal with a cognac. Curd is acidic (it contains lactic acid) and alcohol mixed with the acid in the stomach's gastric juices could cause nausea after a dish of this delicious indigenous delicacy you're unlikely to want alcohol anyway, only another bowl of curd. and why not. If it's good for you.

The writer is a former nurse who has worked in England.



A clay pot of curd contains enough for three people