

Hungarian Homage

Crafting túró, the country's favorite cheese, is a matter of time more than technique

Written by Carolyn Bánfalvi

LIKE A LABORATORY, every corner of my Hungarian mother-in-law's kitchen is stuffed with creations in progress. Usually this includes a pot filled with curdling milk in the process of being transformed into túró, a staple that many Hungarians describe as similar to cottage cheese. But not cottage cheese as Americans know it. Túró is a fresh, soft-curd cheese, more like a tangy farmer's cheese or quark. It is usually made in Hungary with cow's milk, but sheep's milk produces a richer version. Goat's milk is occasionally used too.

Hungarians prefer their cheese young and fresh; túró is the most common type, accounting for half of all cheese consumed in the country. At market halls it is scooped from large bins and sold by the kilogram, and even the smallest grocery stores stock several brands. It is the main ingredient in a number of classic Hungarian dishes, both savory and sweet. One of the most common is *körözött* (better known as Liptauer), a spread made of túró seasoned with sweet paprika, garlic, onions, salt, and caraway seeds. It is often mixed with pasta and topped with diced bacon and sour cream to make *csusza*. *Túrógombóc* are slightly sweet dumplings made of túró rolled in buttered bread crumbs. Both strudel and *palacsinta* (crêpes) are filled with sweetened túró. The cheese is even coated in chocolate to create the popular Túró Rudi Hungarian snack bar. I enjoy the simplest preparation: mixing túró with a handful of chopped herbs and a sprinkle of salt to spread on good bread.

These recipes are best made with authentic túró—which is easy to produce at home the old-fashioned way, as many Hungarian cooks still do. The process involves little more than patiently letting the milk sit and sour naturally (in Hungarian this is called *aludttej* or “sleeping milk”) for about two days, before gently heating the milk. Traditionally, túró is made with ultra-fresh, raw milk, but the following recipe works well with organic pasteurized milk. **c**

Carolyn Bánfalvi is a writer based in Budapest and the author of *Food Wine Budapest: A Terroir Guide*.

C Find a recipe for *túrógombóc* (Hungarian cheese dumplings made with túró) at culturecheesemag.com/recipes.



Draining the curd

TÚRÓ

MAKES 12 OUNCES

- 1½ quarts fresh organic whole milk
 - 3-quart saucepan (with tight-fitting lid)
 - Cheesecloth
 - Large bowl
 - Strainer
 - Slotted spoon
- Pour the milk into the saucepan, cover, and let sit for two days at room temperature (60° to 70°F). Do not move the pan or stir the milk.
- Heat the milk over the lowest heat possible (use a heat diffuser if it

begins to bubble) to at least 161°F. Do not stir; the whey (the yellowish liquid) will separate from the curds. This should take 1 to 2 hours, depending on the strength of the heat. Check the curds occasionally with the slotted spoon. Remove from the heat when the curds are set in a large clump on the bottom (it will look similar to sour cream).

- Place the strainer in a bowl and line with cheesecloth. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the curds onto the cheesecloth. Drain the residual whey from the curds by tying the ends of the cheesecloth to something secure, such as a kitchen wall hook, and hang the curds over the bowl. Drain for a few hours and then check the túró's texture; the longer it drains, the drier it will be.

KÖRÖZÖTT (LIPTAUER)

Hungarians serve this spiced cheese spread with chunks of bread as part of an appetizer spread.



- 8 ounces túró
- ½ small onion, minced
- 2 ounces butter, chopped, at room temperature
- 1 heaping teaspoon sweet Hungarian paprika
- ½ teaspoon caraway seeds
- ½ teaspoon prepared mustard
- Salt, to taste

Optional: a splash of Hungarian plum brandy or beer, chopped capers, chopped parsley, or chopped anchovies

- Combine all ingredients and mix until thoroughly blended. Refrigerate several hours or overnight to allow flavors to meld.