

The Story of Butter



Butter is the fat of milk in its solid form, principally, from the milk of cows, sheep, and goats. When or where man first learned to concentrate this small portion of milk and utilize it as a semi-storable and high-energy food is unknown. One of the earliest methods of butter making was to fill skin pouches with milk and throw the pouches over the backs of horses. When the horses were made to trot, the milk was agitated and formed butter. Later, as butter became a staple food, various types of churns were devised. These consisted of swinging, rocking rotating barrels, boxes, or cylindrical vessels which had dashers or plungers. The Hindus used butter as a food as early as 2000 B.C. The Scythians and the Greeks used it in the 5th Century B.C. In Europe the making of butter for food was probably introduced very early through Scandinavia. Certainly, it has long been used and relished by man as a spread, in tea, and as a cooking fat.

Butter making was introduced into America in 1607 by the Jamestown colonists, who brought the first dairy cows. The first step in producing butter is to separate the cream from the milk. This was done by placing the milk in pans to let the cream rise to the top. Separated milk is the product from which nearly all the cream has been removed. At this point, the cream that had been collected was allowed to sour by being kept it at room temperature for about a day. This allows the lactic acid bacteria to grow and ripen the cream. The cream was then put in the butter churn and mixed as fast as a person could pull and push on the handle. This continued until the butter formed in the churn where the cream had turned into a solid and a thin liquid.

This thin looking liquid that was left in the churn was buttermilk, the non-fatty part of the cream. It was drained off, and cold water was added to the butter in the churn. The water flushed out any remaining buttermilk. If excess buttermilk was not removed, the butter would spoil. After the water was drained away, salt was added to preserve the butter.