

Yogurt is flavorful dairy treat

Milk is a versatile product when used in the manufacture of an almost limitless variety of dairy products. One such dairy product, growing rapidly in popularity, is yogurt.

Yogurt is essentially a form of sour or fermented milk. By adding a bacterial culture or "bulk starter" (containing lactobacillus bulgaricus and streptococcus thermophilus) to fresh milk, the lactose in the milk ferments and changes to lactic acid, causing the milk to thicken or jell. The resulting product is plain yogurt.

Although plain "set-style" yogurt has many uses, it does not have a wide appeal. Manufacturers began experimenting with sweeteners and flavors, such as coffee and vanilla, to enhance yogurt's flavor. Later, preserves or jams were placed at the bottom of the yogurt container.

Recognizing the increasing popularity of fruit-flavored yogurt, Canada's yogurt producers, introduced a new type of yogurt which had chunks of fruit blended throughout the product, resulting in an entirely different flavor and a lighter, creamier texture than that of the traditional "set-style" yogurt. The process, which is called "swiss-style", was first developed commercially in Switzerland in 1962. It involves setting or jelling the yogurt in bulk, rather than in individual containers, and then gently spinning the fruit chunks into the mixture before the packaging process.

To make set-style yogurt, fresh milk, skimmed to two per cent then enriched with non-fat dry milk, is pasteurized, and homogenized in one continuous automatic operation.

The milk, at 115 degrees F, then flows into vats where bulk starter is added for plain yogurt, bulk starter, sugar and flavoring for the flavored yogurt. From there, the hot mixture is poured into containers, sealed and put into incubators until the milk protein coagulates. In about three hours the yogurt is "set". It is then cooled rapidly for a precise time so that it is neither over- or under-fermented.

In spun fruit yogurt, production differs in that fermentation takes place in bulk — in milk cans, vats, tanks or silos — and the fruit and sugar are added afterwards. The fruit is delicately blended into the yogurt without agitation so that the end result is smooth but not runny. The blended yogurt is then poured into containers and sealed in the normal manner.

STRAWBERRY MOUSSE

- 3½ cups strawberries, cleaned
- ¼ cup white sugar
- 500 mL carton plain yogurt
- 1 tsp. vanilla essence
- grated chocolate
- 2 tbsp. chopped almonds

Set aside a few strawberries for a garnish. Puree the remaining strawberries in the blender. In a bowl, mix the puree strawberries, sugar, yogurt and vanilla. Spoon into dessert dishes and garnish with shredded chocolate, chopped almonds, and reserved strawberries. Depending upon the size of the dishes, this dessert will serve four to six.

FRESH CUCUMBER SALAD SOLIOU

- 2 medium cucumbers
- 125 g plain yogurt
- a few fresh mint leaves

Peel the cucumbers and slice thinly. Add a dash of salt, then mix in the yogurt and mint leaves. Serve chilled. Serves four.

SPINACH AND MUSHROOM SALAD

- 4 cups chilled, torn fresh spinach
- 2 fresh tomatoes, sliced
- 1½ cups fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 2 slices bacon, crisply cooked and broken in bits
- Deli dressing:
- 125 g plain yogurt
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. fresh basil
- dash of salt and pepper

Combine all vegetables and bacon bits in a bowl. Mix all the dressing ingredients and pour over the salad. Mix gently. Serves four as a side dish with broiled meats.

AVOCADO SOUP

- 2 ripe, soft avocados
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 cup cold chicken broth
- 125 g plain yogurt
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 2 per cent milk
- salt and pepper, to taste

Peel and pit the avocados. Set aside four thin slices for garnish, brushing them with lemon juice to prevent them from browning. Place the remaining avocado and the chicken broth in a blender and blend until smooth. Add the yogurt and white wine and blend again. Gradually add the milk until the soup has a creamy texture (you might need as much as three-quarters of a cup). Taste, then season with salt and pepper.

Chill the soup and serve garnished with the reserved avocado slices. Recipe serves four.

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