



UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County

Preserve It! Preserving Basics

Cheesecloth and Butter Muslin

SIMILAR, BUT DIFFERENT

Cheesecloth and butter muslin are loosely woven cotton fabrics used for making – yes, of course, cheese and butter – as well as for other culinary and household purposes. Is there a difference, and does it matter which cloth you use? Yes and yes. For best results, match the cloth to your purpose.

Cheesecloth comes in at least seven different grades, ranging from a very open weave Grade 10 (20x12 threads per square inch) to a more closely woven Grade 90 (44x36 threads per square inch). Grades 10 through 50 are general purpose cloths that can be used for cleaning, polishing and staining, crafts, cooking and more, although the more open the weave, the more layers you may need, especially for straining and cooking. The tighter the weave, the more durable the cloth.

Grade 60 cheesecloth, with a thread count of 32x28, is considered a high quality, medium grade weave and is used commonly in cheesemaking for draining large curds, bandaging and air-drying cheeses, lining molds for hard cheeses, as well as for many other culinary purposes. A good multi-purpose cloth (although you may need to use multiple layers), it is durable and can be washed and reused.

Grade 90 cheesecloth is the finest weave of cheesecloth (sometimes called “extra fine”) with a thread count of 44x36 threads per square inch. In cheesemaking, it is preferred for draining small-curd cheeses, as its tighter weave prevents small curds from slipping through. It can also be used for draining yogurt and similar dairy products (although it may need to be double-layered, depending on the thickness of the yogurt). Other culinary uses include making tea bags and herb sachets, straining stocks, etc. Its fine weave also makes it useful for curtains, dress making, staining, crafting, and more. Highly durable, Grade 90 cheesecloth can be washed and re-used many times.

Butter muslin is usually just another name for Grade 90 cheesecloth. It is sometimes mistakenly referred to as having 90 threads per inch, but Grade 90 is really 80 threads per inch ($44 + 36 = 80$).



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When purchasing cheesecloth or butter muslin, check the grade or thread count so that you know what you're getting. What you find at the hardware store is likely not what you want to use in your kitchen. Can "regular" dress making or sheeting **muslin** be used for culinary purposes? Sure, but keep in mind your intended purpose. Sheeting muslin with a thread count, for example, of 200 threads per inch may be too fine a cloth for draining cheese; you may find that a looser weave (and less expensive) muslin is better suited to the task. Cotton **flour sack towels** also make good draining cloths, and their higher thread counts (generally 120-130 threads per inch) are great for removing small particulates when straining stocks, cold brew coffee, and the like. **Jelly bags** work great, too.

Cheesecloth can be found in both bleached and natural forms. Food grade bleached cheesecloth has been processed with peroxide to whiten the cloth and remove impurities. Natural cheesecloth is unbleached and is a light tan in color. Which you choose is a personal preference. When selecting natural or organic cotton cloth for culinary purposes, keep in mind that some of these cloths may retain cotton seed particles or oils (which are probably not what you want in your fromage blanc).

Before cheesecloth or butter muslin (or any cloth used for culinary purposes) is first used, it should be washed and sterilized. Use a mild unscented detergent, then rinse very thoroughly to remove soap residue. To sterilize, boil the cloth for 10-15 minutes, then hang it to dry. Once it is completely dry, fold and store it in a sealable plastic bag. After each use of the cloth, carefully rinse it to remove any curds or particulate matter, then wash, sterilize, dry and store as above. High-grade cheesecloth and butter muslin can also be machine washed. Some cheesemakers recommend storing your cheesecloth and butter muslin separately, and even suggest separating cloths by milk type and style of cheese.

Visit our website for more Preserve It! food safety and preserving informational posters, Preserving Fundamentals publications, recipes, class schedules, and more.

For general information on preserving, visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation (NCHFP) at <https://nchfp.uga.edu/> or contact your local Cooperative Extension office.