

COOKING TIPS

How to Make Ghee: the Better, Nuttier Butter

0 comments

The Indian subcontinent's essential, nutty-rich clarified butter is shelf-stable, great for cooking, and utterly delicious. Best of all, it's easy to make.



By Alyssa Vaughn

Published Mar. 8, 2024.

“In the Vedic times one who had ample stocks of ghee was said to possess liquid gold,” cookbook author Yamuna Dasi wrote in her classic, scrupulous guide *Lord Krishna's Cuisine: The Art of Indian Vegetarian Cooking* (1987).

Anyone familiar with ghee knows that this is hardly an exaggeration. The Indian subcontinent's ubiquitous clarified butter has long been treasured as a topping, ingredient and cooking fat.

Ghee is a supremely practical ingredient to have on hand. It's shelf-stable and lasts for months, contains no lactose, and has a high smoke point.

It's also delicious: Finishing roti, Basmati rice, or dal with a dollop of ghee lends the dish an irreplacable clean, light nuttiness.

And while ghee is sold widely in supermarkets, it's easy (and cheaper) to make it at home. Indian cooks have been making their own ghee for centuries. As Dasi wrote, “There is something quite wonderful about the caramel-like aroma of a pot of ghee simmering on the kitchen stove.”

To try it yourself, all you'll need is butter and time.

What Is Ghee?

Ghee is a form of clarified butter made by slowly simmering butter until all of its moisture has evaporated and its milk solids begin to brown.

These solids are then strained out, and the remaining pure butterfat has a nutty flavor and aroma and an ultrahigh smoke point (as much as 485 degrees) that allows it to be used for high-heat applications in which whole butter (with a smoke point of 250 to 300 degrees) would burn.

Ghee versus Clarified Butter

Both ghee and the clarified butter more traditional to Western cuisine are made by heating butter to break its emulsion, evaporating the butter's water, and straining out the milk solids from the pure fat.

The difference between the two is that clarified butter is removed from the heat once the milk solids have separated.

Ghee, on the other hand, is left to cook for a few minutes longer, until the solids take on some browning, before it's strained. This is what gives ghee its nutty, toasted flavor.

How to Make Ghee

Making ghee is simple—and much more economical than purchasing jarred. Ghee is traditionally made on the stovetop, but we like this more hands-off oven method.

1. Place 1 to 2 pounds unsalted butter (your yield will be about 80 percent of the butter's weight, so roughly 12-25 ounces) in Dutch oven and cook, uncovered, on lower-middle rack of 250-degree oven for 2 to 3 hours, or until all water evaporates and solids are golden brown.
2. Let cool slightly and strain ghee through fine-mesh sieve lined with cheesecloth. Pour into clean glass jar, let cool completely, and seal.

How to Store Ghee

Ghee is a pure fat and thus can be stored at room temperature.

Whole butter contains water and requires cold storage to prevent spoilage. The presence of water in butter speeds up the oxidation reactions that turn it rancid.

But clarifying it means that it can be stored like oil—at cool room temperature, but away from heat and light.

Stored in a sealed glass jar and kept in a cool, dry place (it will still keep longer in the fridge), it will keep for at least three months. If your ghee starts to smell and taste rancid or cheesy, it's time to make a new batch.

How to Use Ghee

Ghee is an incredibly versatile ingredient to have on hand. Here are some of the core ways it's used.

As a cooking fat: Ghee is the traditional cooking fat for recipes such as Palak Dal and for griddling flatbreads such as Alu Paratha. Also try sautéing vegetables, frying eggs, or searing proteins in ghee rather than oil to impart that rich, buttery flavor.

As a clarified butter replacement: Use it for dipping seafood or brushing flaky pastries.

As a condiment: Try spreading it on toast or tossing it with popcorn.