

## The Discovery of Crescenza & Domiati Cheese

It all started simply enough. We went to the annual Ag trade show on a Wednesday in January, then off to Home Depot for a new humidifier, and finally to The Olive Garden for an early dinner, our usual place when we go to the show. As we perused the menu I saw an entrée called a piadina; the picture and description looked and sounded like an Italian version of a quesadilla. I didn't order it, but I did write down the name so I could research it later.

Back home I hit the internet to satiate my curiosity (it was about 6 PM and we had already eaten – that usually doesn't happen until about 7 PM here). I found out about the region the dish comes from and that it is a street food. Typically it is a combination of cured meats (prosciutto, various types of salamis, smoked sausages, etc.), traditional cheeses (squacquerone and stracchino di crescenza), and some tomatoes and arugula. The bread is an Italian flatbread simply made with flour, salt, and lard, (much like a tortilla) I even found a couple of recipes.

So far so good, except for the cheeses – never seen them nor even heard of them (I cruise the cheese sections in regular and specialty stores wherever I go). New search! Well, I found a couple of references for squacuerone, I found out it is a fresh cheese but I never found a recipe. On to the next one. This one was a bit confusing, officially called stracchino di crescenza many references only call it by one name or the other but it is a fresh cows' milk cheese. Finally I found some recipes for crescenza! Now some more confusion, some of the recipes called for a mesophilic starter and others a thermophilic. One of the sites with a recipe was New England Cheese Making (cheesemaking.com) – it is often my first stop when looking for new cheese recipes. On the recipe there, Jim, their cheese guru, who researches and tests most of the recipes, in the Info section explains what he found in his research into the authentic Italian versions – thermophilic.

I really enjoy making cheese. Watching the magic transformation of milk into cheese and the variety of tastes and textures created from the same basic ingredients by slight changes in temperatures, timing, cultures, coagulating agent, procedures, and equipment used. Over the last 10 or 12 years I have become a pretty competent fresh cheese maker. Oh, how I wish I could make aged cheese! I have tried – over & over again. I have tried many batches of mold ripened semi-soft cheeses with just 4 to 8 weeks of aging, gouda with 4 months, Cheshire, Cotswold, simple tomme, natural rind, washed rind, and waxed cheeses. We may have eaten one or two. Marcia thinks it might be my short attention span. I would like to blame it on not being able to create the perfect ripening/ageing conditions. Okay, just because many/most of these cheeses have been created for centuries without thermometers, humidistats, plastic boxes, draining mats, refrigeration, etc., – she may be right.

Back to the piadina! I need the right cheese and now I have a recipe for crescenza, a fresh cows' milk cheese made with a thermophilic culture. Easy! On Friday I headed off to the PO and The Milk House, my source for raw Jersey/cross milk

and fresh yogurt. Once home I started the cheese right away. It takes longer than most fresh cheeses – knew that as I had read the recipe through a couple of times. Got everything in the works knowing that I did not have two 4” x 4” square molds (without bottoms) for the cheese. I figured that as I went through the process I could come up with something. Well, my rectangular feta mold was too big, my round basket molds were too small and tapered for the volume, there were no plastic berry baskets in the cellar, I couldn’t find any recycled or even regular storage containers I could cut the bottom out of and add holes – hum. Let’s try the Camembert molds, bottomless – good, 4 1/4” diameter – close in volume after checking on [calculatorsoup.com](http://calculatorsoup.com).

I found them just in time – I needed to sterilize them and get them ready for the curd in about 15 minutes. Yeah, done, then the waiting for draining and flipping began. Then it was a cover and some mellowing until the morning when it was unmolded and put in the fridge, covered and on a draining mat.

This cheese is supposed to get better after a few days and last night we had company. So, tonight is it! This AM I headed off to Hannaford to pick up scripts and do some shopping. I picked up prosciutto (we never have it), Genoa salami, arugula and some flour tortillas (I know – I found a recipe for the real piadina – they are really close). Honest, next time (if it is good) I will make it from scratch, I even have leaf lard I rendered that I can use.

I’m off to prepare them now for dinner. I have the cast iron skillet all ready for the heating.

Now for the rest of the story... This cheese was worth the research and the wait! It is creamy and smooth, tasting of the rich local milk I made it with, solid enough to slice, it acts much like fresh mozzarella but with more flavor. We had two nights of piadinas using the first batch. I made a second batch and we used most of it on pizza, I had some left over but knew it would be good for a few more days so I let it sit in the fridge.

I only have 4 cheese making books but they are often on the table for me to look through with my morning coffee. Searching for a new, different fresh cheese to make I picked up [200 Easy Homemade Cheese Recipes](#). In the Ethnic and Regional Cheese section I found a fresh cheese called Domiati, an Egyptian derived cheese. I started reading through the recipe and instructions – well, it was unusual in that it added the salt at the beginning of the process, just like Crescenza. Yep, everything was the same in the ingredients and the process, except Domiati is stored in brine, like a feta, making the shelf life up to 6 or 8 months. I went to the fridge, grabbed my half round of left over Crescenza and put it in my feta container. It was just as yummy 3 weeks later!

Now I’m waiting for summer and fresh tomatoes from Marcia’s garden so we can have caprisis (caprese) salad made with the Crescenza/Domiati. No more buying or making fresh mozzarella!