

---

First of all, a review of the concept of washing.

Our goal, contrary to what many people think, is not to create a clean cheese. Our goal is to make a really infested cheese. But we wash it in such a way as to discourage certain organisms (molds and yeast) and encourage certain others (bacteria, especially *b. linens*). People figured out how to do this by centuries of experimenting without understanding what was going on microbiologically. Fortunately, we don't have to figure it out for ourselves since they did long ago.

Washing will keep the mold from growing. We are somewhat poisoning the surface with alcohol which quickly evaporates or is absorbed into the cheese and broken down, so it really doesn't amount to much as a mold killer after the first few minutes. But that brief moment does kill any small colonies that may have started.

Keeping the cheese wet is really the most important thing early on. Mold won't grow if it is too wet. Again, mold likes dampness. If your cheese is lightly damp, mold will go crazy on it. If it is sticky wet, mold can't grow (I suppose it can't adhere to the surface)

What we need to do then is to get our bacteria matured to the point where it will kill off any mold that tries to grow. We create a strong organism that eliminates its competition. As a side benefit, these bacteria also give us a nice flavor. This is where the smear comes into play. Every time we wash the cheese, we need to have this slimy cream worked up and thoroughly smeared all around. This is the environment where *b. linens* will thrive. We keep doing this until the cheese really starts to smell. But it should smell like dirty feet. If it smells like bread or like dirt or like urine or ammonia or any other strange thing then something is wrong. But this is unlikely to happen.

We can cultivate our own *b. linens*. I suspect that your cheese may not have had enough exposure to the air around it or to your skin to pick them up. DO you wear gloves when you wash it? Don't. You want to let the *b. linens* that grow all over you spread onto the cheese. Do you keep the cheese hermetically sealed from the real world? don't, because your bacteria will have no way of getting to it.

If we use adjuncts as surface ripeners, then we keep it isolated and all that, but for a simple washed rind traditionally we rely on nature to supply our ripeners. Again this goes back to the goal of washing. Exposed to nature, there is a great deal of risk of contamination from undesirable organisms. We remove this risk by the way we care

for the cheese. We make it an environment inhospitable to the likely offenders and very hospitable to our desired bacteria.

This not only applies to the cheese, but also the water we use to wash it. In German, this water is called *Schmierwasser*. This implies that it is what we call a *Schmier* which would have the same meaning as when we talk of a smear ripened cheese. What we are implying is that our washing water is thoroughly colonized by b. linens or something similar. So this means that

1. The water needs to get some of the smear from the cheese in it. So don't wash your brush off before you dip it again.
2. The water can't have so much alcohol content as to kill them. Maybe your proportion of wine and water should be reversed. Twice as much water as wine seems like a reasonable ratio to me (I have no where near as much as this in mine, maybe closer to 4 times more water)
3. We don't need to keep the water 'clean'. I have never boiled or otherwise sterilized the water used for my wash. I just use hard water straight from the tap (which I know contains some bacteria, because it comes from a peat bog)

If you just can't seem to get linens started, you might just add a pinch of linen starters to your wash.

When you brush the cheese, be slow and gentle. But do it long enough to get a good smear each time. Also, flip and wash only the top and sides, never the bottoms. This will just make a mess.

You might also consider keeping your cheese on a piece of wood. Softwood. Spruce or fir if you have it. Each time you turn the cheese, wash the wood with your wash water.