Crikey, where on earth to start on this one?!

May I give a small tip: start looking as soon as possible if you need second-hand equipment as it is thin on the ground.

I started looking at new but it was too expensive for a tiny concern like mine although I still look at the photos and salivate. Imagine having a vat with an automatic stirrer!

Anyway, if you are on a limited budget, think second-hand and/or adapt things designed for other uses. One friend adapted a swimming pool heater to heat his milk.

My kitchen stock pot is my smallest vat. My smaller stirrers are from the kitchen drawer which drives my husband nuts but still..

Essential kit; let's start small;

Thermometer: this is under £12 from *Ascott Smallholdings* or *Moorlands Cheesemakers*, the dairy one with a round dial. The thin glass ones always seem to break and glass is a no no with commercial cheesemaking. I expect I may graduate on to a digital probe which will mean I don't have to hold it but this one is fine for the time being.

The **stirring spoon** has slots in it for the milk to pass through. From kitchen shops and stainless steel for sterilising (could be plastic).

The already mentioned **stock pot** has a lid and amount markings; very useful for small batches and my tiny amounts of curd cheese. I also pasteurise the goats' milk in it. It's just over 10 Litres.

Now; **knives** for cutting curd. Mine were quite expensive and always seem to cost a bit. You need two; horizontal and vertical. Books show you how to cut with a carving knife but I could never get cubes that way.

The **vat** is 100L and although small, will always be useful because when I graduate on to the big vat, I can still use this one for experimental batches. And it is so sweet. It is very simple. I recall Liz (who sold it to me) laughing when I asked where I could plug it in.. you can't. It's a simple jacketed design where you pour hot water into the side and the milk inside the vat heats up..very slowly! Liz and her husband Neil were successful cheesemakers in Scotland and another cheesemaker told me they were closing so a lot of my equipment came from them plus ongoing advice and support which you cannot put a price on.

{highslide}moulds.jpg&captionText:'My moulds set out on the plastic mats'{/highslide}

Anyway, the big vat is from next door Alderney and needs to be adapted to please Guernsey Electricity when the lovely electrician has time to return! It came with a press and loads of Gouda moulds which will come in useful if I do Gouda! It looks like a 6ft coffin and the stirrer is a big plastic spade with holes in it.
I have 220 other **moulds**. Too many but you never know. You can cut up PVC piping and use that to save a lot of money but I like the holes in the side that mine have.

From Scotland too, came **stackable drying racks** which haven't really come into their own yet but will I hope. I think they are useful if you can simply push the unmoulded cheeses into a room to ripen but I haven't the space for that and they are not strong enough for the initial overnight draining when the cheese is very wet, heavy and still in the moulds. I also have
plastic mats
which I have cut up to help me turn the cheese more easily.

{highslide}rack.jpg&captionText:'Racks'{/highslide}

Two **long plastic draining tables** came too. Very useful but the floor slopes so I have to lift the end to drain the whey through the hole at the end. Still loads to learn!

I am actually trying to buy **heavy duty draining trays** at the moment as my first two batches of camembert had to be chucked as they went slimy, smelly and blew up like balloons. A drainage problem I'm told! Three will cost about £250.

The **double sink and drainer** is great. Not a second-hand bargain though; it was second-hand but not cheap if you know what I mean.

{highslide}washup.jpg&captionText:'Here you can see my double sinks, dishwasher, hand sink and related items plus the hose with shower connection'{/highslide}

The **dishwasher** isn't essential but jolly nice as it cleans the moulds beautifully and saves lots of scrubbing. Free from the dump!

The **air-conditioning** unit is *Vyair* and great so far. About £300.

Flyzapper (essential) only about £27.00.

{highslide}wall.jpg&captionText:'My air conditioning unit and flyzapper'{/highslide}

Also needed to buy a **hand-wash sink** with **towel** and **soap dispenser**.

The ceiling light is a strip light with **plastic cover**.

Fridges; I looked into humidity fridges but they are very expensive so I use old fridges (not from the dump; against health and safety regs. apparently) and for the humidity I put water into dishes in the base of the fridge. I do, however have **fridge thermometers** in all and have bought a
humidity meter

for checking the humidity occasionally. Fridge thermometers are cheap in kitchen shops.

Cheese culture has to be kept frozen so I have a **fridge-freezer** in the room too which is my proper cold fridge too.

The **tap** has a **hose and shower connection**; essential for rinsing off the sterilising solution.

Very useful and used all the time is a cheap **plastic bucket**.

I also have a **large plastic basin** which lies on the ground under the draining table. This was from *Lakeland Plastics* and is really for soaking oven trays but is very good for lots of things.

I have **micro scales** for measuring the minute weights of cheese culture and **large scales** for the finished product. The large scales are *Avery* and were about £100. I love them. You feel like a child playing grocers with those! *Trading standards* had to look at them to check I wasn't going to diddle anyone.

{highslide}packing.jpg&captionText:'My packing and weighing area complete with trusty radio companion'{/highslide}

I also have a brine **refractometer** for checking salt concentration in the brine solution for the camembert. That makes me feel like a scientist especially with my white coat on....

Other expenses are point of sale things like a **pricing gun, date stamper, label printer** (*Dymo*) and I'll go into the other labels and packaging another time.

I expect there are experienced cheesemakers out there who may think some of my choices are all wrong but I really have been in the dark a bit here and have grabbed what I can or have got the room for. Being a member of *The Specialist Cheesemakers' Association* has been so important too. They have a list of suppliers of equipment and ingredients and a list of members who are very helpful to each other. There are, after all, less than 500 cheesemakers out there. Often, too, their newsletter has details of equipment for sale.

Good luck!

Previous - Part 3 Next- Part 5