

Q Search



OPEN A GOLD SAVINGS ACCOUNT. [GET STARTED](#) **HARD ASSETS ALLIANCE**

Home » Articles » Preserving Meat By Curing and Smoking

WHAT SHOULD I DO?



Dan Jablow, founder of Jablow's Meats

Preserving Meat By Curing and Smoking

And how to make your own Bacon - DIY Style

by DanJablow

Friday, July 22, 2011, 1:09 AM

116 Shares

Share

Tweet

Share

Tags [Food Preservation](#), [What Should I Do?](#)



In a future defined by increasingly expensive and/or scarce energy, food preservation skills will take on heightened importance. What if prolonged, unpredictable blackouts cause your refrigerated food to spoil frequently? Or rising inflation threatens to make tomorrow's staples substantially higher than today's?

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)



This article provides an introduction to the two most widespread techniques for preserving meat – curing and smoking – which have been practiced since ancient times. They're often used in conjunction with each other. In this post, I'll explain the basic science underlying each and how they enable you to vastly extend the storage life of your meats while eating healthier at the same time. We'll end with a practical recipe that anyone can follow, regardless of prior experience in the kitchen.

For this exercise, we're going to focus on everybody's favorite meat: *bacon*.

I've always loved meat, and when I was finally ready to prepare meat at home, I decided that bacon was the perfect entry point into the world of smoked and cured meats. Bacon is all the rage, and personally, I'm all for it. I love bacon – there's nothing quite like it. While it's fatty, full of cholesterol, and no sane doctor would advocate eating it in large quantities on a recurring basis, it's been firmly ingrained in the American diet for generations, eaten once out of necessity and now for pleasure and enjoyment. Most Americans are familiar with bacon, yet not everyone knows how to make it or where it even comes from. While there are many different variations of bacon around the world, the traditional American style of bacon that most of us are familiar with is prepared by curing and smoking pork belly.

Curing

At its most basic, to cure is simply to preserve in salt. In the days before refrigeration, curing meat and fish in salt was practically the only way to preserve those foods. Left to their own devices, bacteria contained within meat or fish will cause it to spoil and rot. By introducing salt, some of the water contained in the muscle fibers of the meat is expelled, thus creating a much less hospitable environment for bacteria to grow and multiply. (With the advent of today's refrigeration technology, curing meat and fish has become less about preservation and more about harnessing its flavor-enhancing properties)

It is common to add other ingredients the curing process to complement and contrast the effects of salt. Sugar, for instance, is used to counterbalance salt and can add a unique flavor to the mix, especially sugars like honey, brown sugar, and maple syrup. Herbs and spices, like black pepper, bay leaves, and allspice, will also impart their own unique flavor to meat and fish during the curing process.

There are generally two methods for curing meat. In both cases, the flavor from the cure will come from salt and the variety of sugars, spices and herbs you choose to use:

- Dry curing: A mixture of salt and other ingredients is rubbed over the meat.
- Wet curing: Also known as brining, this involves submerging meat in a salty solution.

But before you start curing, there's one final ingredient to include. Sodium nitrite, naturally occurring in green leafy vegetables like lettuce, spinach, and celery, is very useful for food preservation because it is one of the few compounds that will retard the growth of a particularly nasty bacterium called botulism. In addition, sodium nitrite will lend its own unique flavor to the meat and cause it to turn an appealing shade of bright red. Whether added in the form of celery juice (or some other leafy green vegetable extract), or by using 'pink salt,' a mixture of 93.75% table salt and 6.25% sodium nitrite, nitrites are toxic in high doses, so their addition to any curing formula must be handled carefully. As a result, the FDA has established strict guidelines for the amount of nitrites that can be added to cured meats. At these levels, it is perfectly safe to consume cured meats. A quick note: If you buy pink salt online or at a specialty store, be sure to ask for Curing Salt #1.

Smoking

Food is smoked when it comes in contact with the smoke generated by smoldering wood, plant, and other organic material. Not to be confused with grilling – a relatively high-heat cooking process in which food is generally suspended over an open flame – smoking relies on indirect heat, low temperatures (180-225 degrees F), and long cooking times to produce food that is mouth wateringly tender and uniquely flavored. In the U.S., common smoke woods include hickory, oak, mesquite, apple, and cherry.

Historically, smoking was performed as a means of preserving food because the smoke itself acts like an acidic coating on the surface of the meat, preventing the growth of bacteria. The smoking process also helps to dehydrate the meat, again creating an environment that is less hospitable for bacteria to thrive in. Like curing, in modern times, smoking of food is done primarily as a way to enhance food's flavor and color, rather than preserve it.

There are generally two types of smoking methods:

- **Hot smoking:** Performed at temperatures of at least 150 degrees F. The goal is to cook the food at the same time it is being flavored with smoke.
- **Cold smoking:** Smoking at temperatures of less than 100 degrees F. This method generally doesn't cook the food product; rather, it is used for flavoring. This is an ideal way to add smoke flavor to cured fish without actually cooking it, or impart smoke flavor to salami and other cured meats before they are hung to dry.

Smokers come in all different shapes and sizes and can use many different types of fuel (charcoal, electricity, propane, etc.) to generate smoke. Some common backyard kettle grills can be lightly modified so that they function as smokers. There are also numerous MacGyver-esque ways to produce smoke using an oven or stove top. If you do purchase a stand-alone smoker, make sure you have outdoor space available.

The Advantages of Preserving Your Own Meats

For many reasons, modern chefs and home cooks are embracing the idea of curing and smoking their own meats. For one, it is a great way to forge a stronger bond with your food, where it comes from, and how it's made. More importantly, by doing your own curing and smoking, you are increasing your food resiliency while eating high-quality meat that contains little to no artificial ingredients.

Take bacon, for example: Much of the bacon consumed in this country is mass-produced in large manufacturing plants to take advantage of speed, distribution networks, and other economies of scale. Yet the curing process required to turn pork belly into bacon takes time. Rather than letting nature take its course, many manufacturers rely on mechanical and other shortcuts to speed up the curing process, choosing to pump the pork bellies with a salty brine containing phosphates to increase the moisture retention of the meat, thus improving yield for the manufacturer. Flavor is also often boosted by introducing MSG to the mix, and in some cases the actual smoking of bacon is even replaced by introducing liquid smoke into the curing mix.

I started making bacon at home in part because I was disappointed with my bacon options in most grocery stores and I began to wonder if there was a better alternative. My entry into curing and smoking began when I realized that, even as a consumer, I could buy pork belly from pasture-raised, antibiotic-, and hormone-free pork that has been fed an all-organic diet and make the bacon myself.

Let's Make Bacon!

There are tons of curing and smoking books out on the market, and to get started, I tried to get my hands on as many of them as possible. After familiarizing myself with the techniques and learning the ins and outs of cures, brines, woods, and smokers, I was ready to try out the simple recipe listed below. Once I felt comfortable executing this basic recipe, I actually modified it to fit my own tastes and create a version of bacon that manages to be both sweet and savory, and just a touch 'spicy.' Trust me – once you master this recipe, you'll also be experimenting in no time!

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

My basic bacon recipe (based on Michael Ruhlman's 'Charcuterie' recipe):

... basic bacon recipe (based on historical, traditional, and charcuterie recipes).

- 1 5lb boneless, skinless pork belly
- 2 oz kosher salt
- 2 oz brown sugar
- 0.25 oz pink salt (aka Curing Salt #1)
- 4 tablespoons freshly ground black pepper

- 1 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- 3 tablespoons five-spice powder (available at most supermarkets)

Instructions

1. Trim the pork belly so that it is roughly square or rectangular shaped.
2. Thoroughly mix the salts, sugar, and spices in a bowl.
3. Place the trimmed belly on a large baking sheet and rub the spice mixture all over the belly. The mixture should be applied evenly and liberally to all surfaces of the belly.
4. Transfer the spice-rubbed belly to a large Ziploc bag (1 or 2 gallon size), seal the bag, and place in the refrigerator for 5 days. Any extra cure can be placed in the bag and rubbed all over the pork.
5. Allow the pork belly to cure for 5 days in the refrigerator. I like to flip over the Ziploc bag every day to continue distributing the cure evenly around the meat, but that's totally optional.
6. After 5 days, remove the belly from the bag and rinse it thoroughly under cold water. Allow the belly to dry on a towel uncovered in the refrigerator overnight.
7. When it's time to smoke your bacon the next day, I prefer to smoke exclusively over a 50/50 mix of apple and cherry wood, which will lend a subtle sweetness to the final bacon. I aim for a temperature of 180-190 degrees F inside the smoker, and I smoke the bacon until its internal temperature reaches 150 degrees F (roughly 4 hours in my charcoal smoker).
8. At this point, the bacon is ready to eat. However, I suggest you resist the temptation and instead allow it to cool in the refrigerator overnight before slicing it the next day. Once sliced, it can be pan-fried and cooked as crispy as you like. Oh, and don't forget to save your bacon fat! It's great for cooking many things, including eggs, vegetables, and potatoes, and can also be especially useful when making cornbread and biscuits.

Here are a few things to note in this recipe. Allow a week to make bacon (it will be worth the wait, I promise). Also, the salt and sugar are listed as weights (as opposed to volumes) per every 5lbs of pork belly, thus allowing precise controls of these two major inputs. Because it is less dense, kosher salt weighs a lot less per cup than table salt, and even then there can be variances between brands. The same goes for sugar – a cup of brown sugar will not weigh the same as a cup of honey or maple syrup.

This recipe is also easily scaled if you plan on making more than 5lbs of bacon at a time, which you may have to once your friends and family taste how good homemade bacon can be!

Privacy - Terms

A Few Links and Sources

- [Heritage Foods](http://www.heritagefoodsusa.com) (www.heritagefoodsusa.com)
- [The Butcher's Guild](http://www.thebutchersguild.org) (www.thebutchersguild.org)
- [A smoker buying guide](http://www.amazingribs.com/BBQ_buyers_guide/index.html) (www.amazingribs.com/BBQ_buyers_guide/index.html)
- [Charcuterie](#) by Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005. ISBN 978-0393058291.)
- [Ratio](#) by Michael Ruhlman (Scribner, 2009. ISBN 978-1416566113.)
- [Great Sausage Recipes and Meat Curing](#) by Ryttek Kutas (The Sausage Maker, Inc., 1984, 4th ed. ISBN 978-0025668607.)
- [Home Production of Quality Meats and Sausages](#) by Stanley and Adam Marianski (Bookmagic, 2010. ISBN 978-0982426739.)

~ **Dan Jablow**



Dan Jablow is owner of **Jablow's Meats**, an artisan smoked meat company specializing in pastrami, pulled pork, and of course, bacon. These days you'll find Dan selling sandwiches at local farmer's markets and fulfilling smoked meat orders in the San Francisco Bay Area. For more information about the practices he uses in preserving and preparing his wares, you can **email Dan**, visit his **website** or **follow him on Facebook**.

SHARE

36
Shares

Share

Tweet

Share



Endorsed Financial Adviser

Looking for a financial adviser who sees the world through a similar lens as we do? Free consultation available.

[Learn more »](#)



Read Our New Book

Prosper! is a "how to" guide for living well no matter what the future brings.

[Learn more »](#)

RELATED CONTENT

[» More](#)

- ▶ **Home Fire-Safe Checklist**
Be Fire-Safe and create a defensible space
- ▶ **Don't Get Hosed by Chemical Contamination**
Your garden hose can be toxic to your health
- ▶ **Vermiculture: Getting Down and Dirty with Worms**
DIY Worm Composter
- ▶ **Natural Disaster Survival Tips**
Be prepared for the unexpected
- ▶ **What Does It Mean to "Shelter in Place"?**
Be prepared for staying put
- ▶ **How to Get Alerts of an Emergency**
Resources for increasing awareness
- ▶ **Essential Items in Your Emergency Survival Kit**
Items to consider and review for your preps
- ▶ **Water Storage In Winter**
Considerations for keeping water from freezing
- ▶ **How to Start and Maintain a Worm Compost Bin**
Vermicompost made easy
- ▶ **How to Make Your Own Toothpaste**
DYI for good dental health

INSIDER

[» More](#)**Off The Cuff: Has Society Lost Its Backbone? 💰**

Have we lost the mettle to address adversity when necessary?

14

▶ **Investors Are Suddenly Going Nuts Over “Scarcity”** 💰

Should something unique, but not useful, be valuable?

38

▶ **Off The Cuff: ‘Don’t Believe For A Second That The Government Has Your Back’** 💰

Fed-watcher Axel Merk decodes yesterday's FOMC announcements

2



COMMENTS

MOST RECENT

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

wotthecurtains: 9 mins ago

PET bottles for storing dry foods with oxygen absorbers

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

Phred: 1 hour ago

Got one too

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

DennisC: 2 hours ago

"Pickled" Eggs

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

VTGothic: 3 hours ago

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

tg43: 3 hours ago

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

agnes xyz: 5 hours ago

Re: What happened to Chris?

Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family

Time2help: 6 hours ago

What happened to Chris?

[Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family](#)

asgordon123: 6 hours ago

Food storage

[Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family](#)

permiegirl: 6 hours ago

Online prep tacking tool

[Creating An Emergency Food Pantry For Your Family](#)

darren: 6 hours ago

NEW FORUM TOPICS

[» More](#)

[Using Ziverdo kit prophylactically](#)

by [lmcdel](#): 2 hours ago

[Solving the Vaccine Passport debate](#)

by [kshilt](#): 4 hours ago

[The Evil History of Politicized Science](#)

by [Oliveoilguy](#): 11 hours ago

[Not a joke- Nike launches Satanic shoe complete w pentagram and human blood](#)

by [Hohhot](#): 17 hours ago

[Two promising Oral Vaccines....Are they safer?](#)

by [Oliveoilguy](#): 1 day ago

[You just can't beat free money](#)

by [VTGothic](#): 2 days ago

[PM Weekly Market Commentary – 03/26/2021](#)

by [davefairtex](#): 2 days ago

[Venezuela medicine from herbs](#)

by [Rootman](#): 3 days ago

[What will drive you to buy wow classic gold?](#)

by [Smarthuiyuan](#): 3 days ago

[JAMA/Columbia Ivermectin Study 3-4-21](#)

by [Joegrane](#): 3 days ago



ABOUT

[Our Mission](#)

[Chris Martenson](#)

[Adam Taggart](#)

[The Team](#)

[Site Posting Guidelines & Rules](#)

[Press and Media](#)

[Advertising](#)

INTERACT

[Contact Us](#)

[Get Help](#)

[Register](#)

[Enroll](#)

[Submit Payment](#)

[Volunteer](#)

FOLLOW US

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[YouTube](#)

[RSS](#)

[Email](#)

[Accessibility Assistant](#) | [Accessibility Statement](#)

Copyright © 2021 Whitney Peak Ventures, LLC. All rights reserved. Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).