

How-To: Make Your Own Bacon

By Andrew Lewis

➡ Bacon has been an important part of our diet for hundreds of years. It is mentioned in the “Forme of Curry” produced by the master cooks of King Richard II, and the general method for producing bacon has remained largely unchanged since the 14th century.

Although I can’t claim that our family recipe goes quite that far back, we have been making our own bacon for several generations. I think that the best bacon is made using the dry curing process, which I will describe here. Dry curing uses dry salt and spices to preserve



the pork, and the resulting bacon has a firm texture and strong taste.

Making bacon is an incredibly satisfying experience. The taste of homemade bacon is far superior to anything that you will purchase in the supermarket, and the process is so simple that you will wonder why you never did it before.

Ingredients

2½ lbs pork belly. Choose a piece of draft with plenty of fat running through it. Tell your butcher that you want to make bacon, and he should provide you with a suitable cut.

6 tbsp pure salt. Note that most table and cooking salts have additives; avoid them if possible.

2 tsp crushed black pepper

Optional Extras

2 tbsp soft brown sugar

2 tsp smoked paprika

2 tsp dried coriander

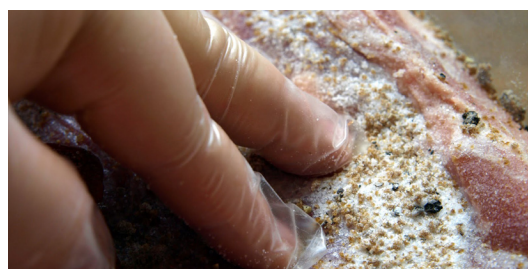
2 tsp crushed dried chili

½ tsp saltpeter. Saltpeter gives the bacon a pinkish color, but some scientific evidence suggests that it may be harmful to your health.

Directions

Step 1. Trim the pork, removing any excess fat and sinew from the flesh side of the draft. If you are using saltpeter, sprinkle it evenly on both sides of the pork and massage it into the meat with your hands. Salt and saltpeter are not friendly to your skin, so you should put on a pair of disposable gloves.

Step 2. Mix the salt, pepper and any optional ingredients together in a bowl. I like to add brown sugar to the mix because it helps the bacon to color when it is



cooked, and it also adds a very slightly smoky flavor.

Sprinkle about a quarter of the salt mixture over the flesh side of the pork, and massage it in well. You need to get an even coating of salt over the entire draft, so make sure that you cover every part of the pork, pushing salt into any hidden pockets and cuts in the meat. I keep the draft in a large, square plastic tub while I am doing this, to minimize the amount of mess.

Turn the pork over, and repeat the exercise on the skin side of the draft. The skin will be very tough to start with, and you will need to massage the salt in for a few minutes to soften it up.

Step 3. Place the pork skin side down in a plastic tray and put it into the refrigerator. The salt will release fluid from the pork, so periodically remove the tray from the refrigerator and dispose of any liquid. A few bamboo skewers laid across the bottom of the tray will keep the bacon clear of the liquid.

Re-salt the pork after 24 hours and turn over so that the skin side is up. Leave the pork in the refrigerator for about another day and a half.

NOTE: There is no definitive method to identify when a piece of bacon is fully cured. Temperature and humidity will affect the curing process, as will the thickness of the draft that you are using. I generally find that 2–3 days in salt is sufficient for a piece of bacon of average size, but larger drafts will take longer.

Step 4. Wash the bacon in cold water to remove any remaining salt, and then pat dry with kitchen towels.

Cut a few thin slices of bacon and fry them in a pan to test the cure. The first couple of slices will be salty because they were right at the end, but the next few slices should give some indication of how well the bacon has cured.

If your bacon is too salty, there is no need to panic. Just soak the bacon in water for a few hours and then try tasting it again.

Step 5. Wrap the bacon in a cheesecloth or cotton bag, and hang it somewhere cool to dry out. The bacon should be hung like this for at least 24 hours and then refrigerated before slicing.

Refrigerating the bacon makes it easier to slice and increases the amount of time that it will keep for.

You can cook your bacon in a pan without any extra fat or oil, and the resulting liquor will add a delicious flavor to croutons, eggs, popcorn, or any number of other dishes. The ends of the bacon will probably be too salty to eat in slices, but can be diced and used to add flavor to soups or casseroles.

