

Biltong

Contributed by Leonie

A lot of people say biltong is similar to Jerky, but I think there's very little comparison. They are both dried meats but, in my opinion, that is where the similarity ends. Biltong is traditionally a South African air-dried meat. It is made from fillets of meat (usually beef but often made from game and ostrich) which are cut into strips along the grain, they are then salted, rinsed in vinegar, spiced and left to dry.

Ingredients:

A lump of beef (you can get away with using any cheap beef, but the better quality cuts will naturally result in better biltong) Coarse sea or rock salt Apple cider vinegar Whole coriander seeds (don't use ground coriander) Ground black pepper Meat hooks or butcher's string

In cooler damper climates like the UK you'll need a box for drying the meat (see picture at the end). If you're using meat hooks, I recommend you sterilise them. I place them in a pan of water and allow to simmer whilst I'm preparing the meat. Cut the meat, along the grain, into strips about half to one inch thick. The thicker you cut the longer it takes to dry. The lump of meat pictured above has firstly been cut in half. I plan to make the biltong in two batches because my drying box isn't big enough. Also, you don't want the slices too long otherwise they'll hang too close to the lamp in the drying box and will cook rather than dry.

Place the slices of meat on a tray or dish, layering generously with the coarse salt. Leave for 1 hour. The longer you leave the meat, the saltier it will taste.

After an hour, scrape the salt off the meat. Do not wash it off. Put the coriander seed into a mortar and pestle and grind roughly.

Pour the vinegar into a bowl.

Take the strips of meat and dip them into the vinegar for a second or so, just to coat the meat with vinegar. Grind over some black pepper, sprinkle both sides with the ground coriander seeds. Using a knife make an incision at one end of the meat and thread a meat hook through the strip of meat.

For the drying box we use a wooden chest. It was one of those cheap ones from B&Q made from untreated pine. It stands on end so that the lid is now a door (see photo below). A light bulb is fitted at the bottom, air holes are drilled through for ventilation (top and bottom) and dowel rails are fitted at the top for the meat to hang from.

Hang the meat in the box for approximately one week. Depending on the thickness of the meat and external conditions it may take more or less time. When you hang the meat make sure the pieces are nicely spaced to allow good air movement around the meat. Check the box daily to make sure the light bulb hasn't popped.

Here is a photo of the finished biltong. It has been hanging in the drying box for a week. It's ready when the meat feels fairly hard but has a little give when squeezed quite firmly and the outside is darkened to almost black. When you slice the biltong it will be ever so slightly pink in the centre. If it's very pink and wet then it needs drying for longer.

We eat it sliced thinly as a snack. To store, it can be frozen (although I have not tried this myself) or loosely wrapped in muslin or greaseproof paper and stored in a cool, dry place.