

Making Bacon - 3 day cure

Contributed by Alison

I have been making bacon now for three years, for my bed and breakfast, and have experimented a lot, to get a flavour and texture I was happy with. There are many different ways of doing it, but we found that this method produces good bacon, which is not too salty and doesn't exude all the white scum on cooking like commercial bacon does. I use a simple cure with sugar, salt and salt petre. There are many discussions on which salt to use, but I think it doesn't make much difference, and cooking salt produces just as good a cure as an expensive sea salt. Salt petre does not have to be used, but in our experience it gives a more palatable colour to the final product. Salt petre is the common name for potassium nitrate. There are many different methods, but this has not failed me yet.

Choosing the meat for bacon making Primarily I would advise buying the best quality meat you can. We raise our own, but if you don't then get to know your local butcher and ask for some local, free range pork. Ask if he knows where it comes from and what breed. I don't think the breed affects the flavour, so much as the lifestyle and feed the pig has received, but it will be interesting finding out. Any meat can be cured but some are better than others. In the pictures I am curing a piece of belly pork, although usually I cure the whole loin of bacon, for a long back bacon rasher. Leg of pork can also be cured, for a delicious ham joint. Ingredients I always have cure made up, but I weighed what I used for this to give a better record. 150g of cure, for a 1kg piece of belly. I make up the cure as follows: 1 Kg cooking salt 250g soft brown sugar 250g Demerara sugar 1 teaspoon saltpetre Curing the bacon Mix it thoroughly together in a bowl. As long as it hasn't come into contact with any raw meat, any spare cure can be stored in an old ice cream carton quite safely. Using handfuls of cure, rub it into the meat; making sure every side is covered. If it is a joint with a bone, then push some cure right up near the bone. If there are any cuts or holes done in the butchering, make sure the cure is used on these also. This should only take a few minutes. When the meat is fully covered put it in a bag, and into a container and into the back of the fridge. After 24 hours take out the meat and pour off the liquid. Do not add any more cure. Do this for another 2 days. When the meat has cured for 3 days wash off any remaining cure. The bacon can then be hung, to air dry, smoked, cooked, as a joint, or sliced and used for a traditional English breakfast. This joint is being made into a bacon and beans dish, cooked as a joint, slowly in the Aga. Making ham If ham is being made then I would drain off the joint for the first few days, and reapply the cure after a week. I would leave the ham for a second week, then wash off the remaining cure. At this point the joint can be air dried, smoked, frozen or cooked. I like my ham roasted with honey poured over it and a few cloves stuck in it. Another tasty method is to boil it, and have it plain as a sandwich ham. Supplier of salt petre: Natural Casing Co Ltd High Point, Dippenhall Farnham Surrey GU10 5EB 01252 713 545 Alison posts here, and also on the River Cottage forum as Alison. Please feel free to discuss this article in the recipes and preserves section of the forum.