

Home Cured Pork Belly Bacon

Dry Cured Bacon



When you make home cured bacon yourself, you are in total control over the quality of the meat and the ingredients you use to cure it! I love the thought of the chemical-free goodness of homemade bacon right in my kitchen.

There are a few considerations that need to be considered and understood when you are “Makin Bacon”.

Processes and Food Safety At Home

There is one primary concern we have to consider when curing and preserving meat, and that is protecting from possible botulism. While botulism is usually related to improper canning/preserving procedures, food-borne botulism also occurs in meats that have been improperly cured. Often this is due to methods and the process used and the possibility can be easily prevented with care and attention detailed below.

To prevent this, most commercially preserved meats contain sodium nitrite, often known as pink salt, which acts both as a preservative and a colour fixer. This also gives store-bought bacon that bright red colour. I am not interested in this colour in my bacon.

Sodium nitrite is toxic in high quantities, and has been

linked to migraines in many people.

For me the main concern about the use of sodium nitrite is that when it is exposed to high heat in the presence of protein (nitrite cured bacon) the proteins in the meat will bond with the sodium nitrite to produce the toxic nitrosamines. Studies have shown that certain nitrosamines have been proven to be deadly carcinogens. This can vary from country to country as far as government policy as to their position on the use of nitrates.

For myself at the end of the day, chemical free bacon is better in flavour and cooks in a different way with incredibly better results.

Frying nitrite-cured bacon presents the scenario for nitrosamines to form when the bacon is cooked and then to enter your system. This alone in my view is a good reason to home cure (with care).

The home cook can much better control the variables and handling procedures, and can get those assurances without the addition of nitrites. Purchasing from your local butcher that has pasture raised pork is the start as it will have a documented procedure and correct food handling record. Organic raised pork is the best choice in my opinion.

I would never use home-kill pork because environment and food safety procedures are not controlled. This is important as a poor hygiene environment can contaminate the meat with food-borne botulism and other possible contaminants.

Making Home Cured Pork Belly Bacon

Ingredients

2kg (4.4lb) piece of pork belly, skin/rind and bones removed
1/2 cup sea salt (not refined iodized table salt)
1/2 cup packed unrefined raw sugar or coconut sugar

1 tbsp. freshly ground black peppercorns
1 tsp nutmeg
1 tbsp toasted fennel seeds
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup bourbon, to taste (optional)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup apple cider vinegar

Method

Cut your pork belly into a nice even square or rectangle, bacon-like block. This can be done by the butcher on request

Mix the dry ingredients in a bowl until they are well combined and the wet ingredients (if using) in a separate bowl until they are well combined.

Making sure that your hands are well washed and clean coat the meat all over with the wet ingredients (if using) until thoroughly coated everywhere.

Place one half of the dry cure mixture in the bottom of the glass dish. Place the wet pork belly into the dish and press it into the salt/sugar mix.

Carefully sprinkle the rest of the mixture across the top of the meat and press it in uniformly all around, using your hands to thoroughly apply the cure mix into every nook and cranny of your pork belly.

Cover and place the dish in the refrigerator for 5-7 days, until the meat feels firm throughout. (5 days is a good average, but check to be sure. The longer you cure it, the saltier it will be.)

Turn the bacon over every day in the liquid that will accumulate in the dish. Pour off half of the liquid each day. After 5-7 days curing remove the pork belly and wash the salt/sugar mixture off of the pork belly very carefully.

Give the soon to be bacon a good pat dry all over with a clean towels. Place the bacon on a rack over a baking sheet and

place in the fridge uncovered for 12-24 hours.

At this point, you can slice it for “green bacon” or you can smoke or roast the whole belly.

If roasting, preheat the oven to 80-90 C. (175-200 F.) Roast the pork belly in the oven to an internal temperature of 65 C (150 F) for about 90 minutes. The meat should be cooked a bit on the outside, but not all the way through.

If smoking, smoke over hickory, cherry or Applewood, a mix is fine at 80 C (175 F) until meat reaches an internal temperature of 65 C (150 F), for about 3 hours. The meat should be cooked a bit on the outside, but not all the way through.

Remove and let the bacon cool to room temperature on a wire rack over the baking sheet, tightly wrap in parchment (butchers) paper, then refrigerate for at least 4 hours, preferably overnight to set the flavour and texture.

Homemade bacon will keep for a week in the refrigerator and several months in the freezer.

**Cold smoking
Introduction from my
friend Nickie Sattler
at Blue Moose
Barbeque**

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So for bacon, we either cold smoke it or hot smoke it. To cold smoke it, we use our bourbon barrel and cold smoke

generator or place it in our gas BBQ grill with an A-Maze-N tube. We use either hickory and apple wood chips for flavour (although I want to try maple or pecan as well).

We cold smoke for about 8-9 hours. To hot smoke it, we use our Oklahoma Joe Highland offset and try to keep the heat down to 150-175 F. We will use apple or hickory to smoke the bacon for 2-3 hours, until bacon reaches 150 F internal.