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Making Beef Jerky

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I always look forward to February. The holidays have come and gone and there are a few precious weeks before spring is in full swing. That leaves me time to research some topics that I didn't have time for the year prior. One of the requests by my family, especially my son-in-law, is to make beef jerky.

To be truthful I was a bit intimidated to try and preserve a meat product at home, but it turns out making beef jerky at home is quite easy. It is also much less expensive than buying it in the store at \$7.99 a package. And with the number of people doing Keto diets this would be a great snack item. Some of the best cuts to try are London Broil and top or bottom round. You can ask the butcher to slice your meat $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick which will save you time. If you need to slice it at home just put it in the freezer for about 30 minutes prior. This will help you to get the thinnest slices possible. Uniform slices will dehydrate more evenly and prevent case hardening, which can lead to some spots that are hard on the outside but still raw on the inside. Case hardening can also occur if you try to dehydrate at a higher temperature than recommended. Once you have your meat you can marinate before processing, or dip meat in a boiling marinade mixture or not marinate it at all. **The most important thing to remember is that the meat must be brought to 160° either before dehydrating or afterwards in order to kill any pathogens in the meat.**

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Since we are dealing with meat here are a few cleanliness tips and safety precautions.

Bacteria can spread through a work area and contaminate equipment and work surfaces. To reduce your risk of foodborne illness:

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before beginning to work, after changing tasks, and after doing anything that could contaminate your hands, such as sneezing or using the bathroom.
- Start with clean equipment and clean it thoroughly after using it. Be sure all surfaces that come into contact with meat and other jerky ingredients are clean.
- Sanitize surfaces with a solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Allow to air dry.
- If using frozen meat, thaw it on a tray in a refrigerator (at 40°F or below) on the lowest shelf to prevent juices from dripping on ready-to-eat foods. Never thaw meat on the kitchen counter.
- Use refrigerated ground meat within two days or whole red meats within three to five days.
- Keep raw meat separate from other foods.
- Marinate raw meat in the refrigerator.

In this recipe you will heat your meat to 160°F in a boiling marinade and then place your strips of meat in the dehydrator. If you choose to heat your jerky after it has been dehydrated you will need to put it in an oven preheated to 275°F for 10 minutes.

Marinated Jerky

1-1/2 to 2 pounds of lean meat such as beef, pork or venison

1/4 cup soy sauce

1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce

1/4 tsp. black pepper

1/4 tsp. garlic powder

1/2 tsp. onion powder

1 tsp. hickory smoke-flavored salt

1. Partially freeze meat to be made into jerky so it will be easier to slice.
2. Cut partially frozen meat into long slices no more than 1/4-inch thick. For tender jerky, cut the meat at right angles to the long muscles of the meat (across the grain). Remove as much visible fat as possible to help prevent off flavors.
3. Prepare 2 to 3 cups of marinade of your choice in a large sauce pan.
4. Bring the marinade to a full rolling boil over medium heat. Add a few meat strips, making sure they are covered by the marinade. Reheat to full boil.
5. Remove pan from range. Using tongs, remove strips from hot marinade (work quickly to prevent overcooking) and place in single, non-overlapping layers on drying racks. (Repeat steps 4 and 5 until all the meat has been precooked.) Add more marinade if needed.
6. Dry at 140 to 150°F in dehydrator, oven or smoker. Test for doneness by letting a piece cool. When cool, it should crack but not break when bent. The meat should not have any moist or underdone spots.
7. Refrigerate the jerky overnight in plastic freezer bags, then check again for doneness. If necessary, dry further. Soaking the strips in marinade before precooking is not advised

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because the marinade could become a source of bacteria. Putting unmarinated strips directly into the boiling marinade minimizes a cooked flavor and maintains the safety of the marinade.

Yield: Dried meat will weigh less than half of the original weight. For example, five pounds of fresh meat should weigh approximately 2 pounds after drying or smoking.

Here is a great publication on making jerky:

<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/food-nutrition/jerky-making-producing-a-traditional-food-with-modern-processes>

We have lots of exciting new classes scheduled including cheese making, tomatoes from seed to table, and pressure canning. To find the entire list of classes please visit our website at [https://ucanr.edu/sites/mfp_of_cs/Classes - Events/Calendar of Events/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/mfp_of_cs/Classes_-_Events/Calendar_of_Events/).

UCCE Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmp@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program and events, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmp>. Sign up to receive our ENewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>. Find us on Facebook and Twitter!