

How Corny
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Just how did corned beef and cabbage, that delightful combination, become the traditional St. Patrick's Day dinner for Irish Americans and "wannabe" Irish Americans? Actually, Ireland in the 1600's exported corned, or salted beef to England and the rest of Europe. Most Irish could not afford this delicacy as both beef and salt cost quite a bit. If a person could afford beef, it would be eaten fresh, a preferred taste. Salting with pellets or "corns" of salt kept the beef preserved for canning and export.

Corned beef turned up in America as a favorite for St. Patrick's Day as many people assumed the Irish loved the dish. You can eat corned beef and cabbage in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day, but the Irish have cooked it for the tourists. Only in America will you find the "traditional" dinner has become a tradition indeed.

Here in America, other cuts of meat can substitute for beef. Use the following recipe to corn beef, bear, moose, antelope or venison. The process makes game less "gamey" and provides opportunity to incorporate other cuts of meat in the "traditional" dinner!

To make six gallons of corning liquid:

3 pounds (6 3/4c.) salt
10 ounces (1 3/8 c.) sugar
2 ounces sodium nitrate
1/2 ounce sodium nitrite
3 level tsp. black pepper
3 level tsp. ground cloves
6 bay leaves
12 level tsp. mixed pickling spice

For onion flavor, add one medium-size onion, minced. For garlic flavor, add 4 garlic cloves, minced. Put the ingredients into a pickle crock or glass jar and add enough water to make a total of 6 gallons, including the ingredients. Cover the container.

The ideal temperature for corning meat is about 38° F. During the fall or spring months this is not too difficult to obtain. In the winter, an unheated part of a basement can be used for corning meat. During summer months, it is hard to find a place around 38° F. Higher temperatures need not affect the end result of the corning process at all, if, for every 15° F of temperature above 38° F, you add one-third more salt. At 83° F, add three pounds more salt, making a total of six pounds of salt.

Place meat into the liquid. Put a heavy plate on meat; weight plate, if necessary, to keep meat below pickle brine.

Leave the meat in corning liquid for 15 days. On the fifth and 10th days, stir the liquid well, remove the meat and put it back so the bottom piece is on top. After the 15th day, remove the meat. Use what you want immediately and store the balance in a cool place refrigerated at 38° degrees. It is recommended that after meat is removed from the corning liquid it should be cooked and consumed within one week or frozen for up to one month. (The meat at this stage has a grayish pink color. When cooked, corned meat changes to the characteristic pink color associated with a cured product.)

Source: North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating

Questions about safe home food preservation? Call the Master Food Preservers and leave a message at (530) 621-5506. A Master Food Preserver will return the call. The Master Food Preservers are also available free of charge to speak to organizations and clubs about food safety or food preservation topics. Just call the number above to arrange for a speaker for small or large groups. For more information about the public education classes and activities, including the free public classes on food safety and pressure canning, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/.