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HOMEMADE JERKY

*Adapted from a Nebraska home economics publication
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Jerky originally came to us from the Indians. Jerky is meat cut into thin strips and dried. Domestic beef and most big-game animals such as deer, antelope, elk, and moose can be used. The cut of meat is relatively unimportant except that it must be lean. Jerky made from the brisket tastes as good as that from the tenderloin.

Properly made jerky keeps well for a long time. It will keep for a year in the freezer. Its nutritional and caloric values are high. While hunting or fishing, two or three strips will provide a quick lunch. At home, it can be served as an appetizer or snack.

Experts disagree on the best way to make jerky. Some insist it must never be smoked. Others prefer the added flavor of smoke. Some use no salt in the preparation, while others do. Individual preference will determine the final outcome.

Preparation

Peel away muscle sheaths and membranes to make the finished jerky easier to chew. Remove all fat. Fat causes dripping while the meat is drying, and drops of fat will turn rancid and spoil jerky that is stored for any length of time.

Slice the meat **with the grain** into strips $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Make strips about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide and as long as possible. Muscles can be pulled apart, but slicing produces more uniform pieces which will dry more evenly and require less attention during drying. Jerky made from meat that has been sliced across the grain will be crumbly and without character or chewability.

Small batches can be made in the oven. Do not try to hurry the drying process by turning up the heat. This will cook the meat as it dries and spoil the jerky. For larger quantities you may want to use a smoker.

Oven Method Jerky

3 lb. beef or venison
1 teaspoon liquid smoke in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
Salt
Pepper
Garlic salt

Remove all fat and slice the meat with the grain, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Dip each slice in the water and liquid smoke. Salt generously. Sprinkle with pepper and garlic salt if desired. Pound the seasoning into the meat lightly with a steak mallet or the edge of a saucer.

Place the strips in layers in a large bowl or crock. Place a plate and weight on top of the meat. Let stand 8 to 10 hours. Remove the meat strips from the bowl and dry on a paper towel.

Spread the strips over a wire rack. Allow the edges to touch but not overlap. Put a pan or foil underneath to catch the drippings, but be sure to allow for air circulation in the oven. Set the oven temperature for 150 degrees. Leave the door slightly ajar and let the meat dry for 11 or 12 hours. The meat will shrivel and turn almost black. When done, the strips will be dry throughout, but should be pliable enough to bend without snapping. Cool and store in an airtight container.

Marinated Oven-Dried Jerky

- 1½ to 2 pounds boneless meat
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon hickory smoke flavored salt

Use lean cuts of beef, venison or white meat of chicken or turkey. Trim and discard all fat from the meat. Cut in ⅛ to ¼ inch thick slices. Combine soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, pepper, garlic, onion powder, and smoke flavored salt. Add to meat strips and thoroughly coat all surfaces. Let stand one hour or cover and refrigerate overnight.

Drain meat strips. Arrange close together but not overlapping on oven racks or on cake racks set over shallow baking pans or aluminum foil to catch the drippings. Dry meat at lowest oven temperature, 150 degrees, with oven door slightly open. The meat will turn brown, feel hard and dry to the touch. It will take up to seven hours for beef or venison; about 5 hours for chicken and turkey.

When dry, pat off any beads of fat. Let cool and store in airtight containers. Makes about ½ pound.

True Venison Jerky

Cut lean strips of venison and place in container of granite, glass, stone, or food grade plastic. Cover with brine solution made from:

- 2 quarts water
- 1 cup salt
- ½ cup sugar
- 4 tablespoons black pepper
- Garlic salt

Place a weight on the meat so the liquid covers the surface and allow it to stand at least 12 hours. Drain well and place on trays. Transfer to smoke house and smoke from 5 to 15 days, depending upon the thickness of pieces to be dried. Use any nonresinous wood such as maple, ash, or apple. When completely dry, store the meat in airtight containers.

Follow specific directions if a commercial smoker is used.