

How to Make Nitrate-Free Bacon

These instructions are meant to be a supplement to the “How to Make Bacon in 3 Easy Steps Using Nitrate-Free Cure” posted on our YouTube channel. These instructions will guide you on both the basic and optimal ways of making bacon at home using our nitrate-free bacon cures.

Before you get started, make sure you are fully prepared with all equipment that you will need on hand. Be sure to check the weather if you will be smoking outside and, more importantly, check your schedule BEFORE you start. If you let the bacon cure for longer than the optimal time of 5 days, it makes for overly salty bacon.

In this section we will discuss the minimum amount of equipment you need to make bacon as well as optional equipment that will make a more consistent product and make it easier for you to make larger quantities of bacon each time.

MEAT QUALITY NOTE: You will want to source your pork belly from as fresh and pure of a source as you can. Pasture raised pork is ideal and should be purchased from your local farmer. If you are unaware of any local farmers in your area, a simple Google search can help you locate one. At the bare minimum, you should be able to order some pork belly at your local meat market, butcher or grocery store. Make sure to order it in 3-5 Lb sizes to avoid having to cut it down to fit into your oven or smoker.

There is not much equipment required to make bacon, but you will need a few things. There are links to all the items used, or items that are similar, in the video description. You will need the following:

- A knife, preferably one that is long enough to go across the width of your pork belly
- A gallon plastic bag or one that is big enough to fit your pork belly
- A straw to remove any air that is remaining before you seal the bag
- A 1 tablespoon measuring spoon for measuring the bacon cure
- Thermometer, preferably digital - a leave-in kind is ideal, but any kind will work.
- Bacon cure – Cure for The Common Bacon or Pepper Cures What Ails Ya – available on our website www.FarOutFoodz.com
- Pork Belly

YOU MUST USE A THERMOMETER! You cannot make this recipe and guarantee it is safe to eat if you don't use a thermometer.

Optional Equipment:

- Wireless digital leave-in Thermometer
- Jelly Roll Pan & baking rack that fits inside
- Aluminum Foil
- Vacuum sealer with bags
- Smoker
- Deli slicer
- Vinyl gloves, food grade or better

Step #1 Curing:

One of the first things you want to do is weigh your pork belly. You also want to make sure that you have a bag big enough to hold your pork belly ready to go.

You'll notice that there is an obvious "meat side" and "fat side". The fat side is mostly white. The fat side is also the bottom of the pig, or the part that hangs the lowest on the animal's stomach. We will refer to the fat side as the "bottom" and the meat side as the "top" going forward.

Wearing food grade vinyl gloves helps keep your hands clean since pork fat is very messy and you may get tired of washing your hands over and over.

Start by opening the pork belly and get it ready for the curing process. Do not rinse the pork belly. It is not necessary, and it generally makes a splattery mess all over your sink and surrounding area. Using your knife, you want to remove most of the excess fat down to no more than 1/2" thick in most places. It doesn't have to be exact. Too much fat and your cure won't penetrate. Also, fat equals flavor so don't cut it all off either.

Start on the bottom (fat side) of the pork belly and sprinkle on 1 Tablespoon of cure at a time. The ratio of cure to pork belly is 1 Tablespoon per pound of pork belly rounded up to the nearest pound. It is possible to apply too much cure resulting in very salty bacon, so sprinkle lightly.

Rub it in with one hand while sprinkling with the other hand. Then flip it over and finish sprinkling and rubbing in the cure until all surfaces have been covered, including the sides. When you have rubbed all the cure required for the weight of your pork belly, put the belly in a freezer bag to go in the refrigerator. You will want to get as much air out of the bag as possible using a straw if you do not have a vacuum sealer.

Leave bag in refrigerator for exactly 5 days or 60 hours. For example, if you put the cure on the pork belly on Friday at 6 PM then you would cook or smoke the pork belly on Wednesday at 6 PM.

CURING NOTE: In our experience, adding wet ingredients to the curing process does absolutely nothing for the finished flavor. Wet ingredients should be added to the top of the pork belly right before smoking.

Step #2 Cooking:

Oven Cooking

The first thing you will want to do is pre-heat your oven to 225°F (107°C) You can use a gas or electric oven.

Place a baking rack inside an aluminum foil lined jelly roll pan and place the pork belly on top of the rack. The rack prevents the pork belly from sitting in its own fat and causing it to become soggy.

Insert the probe of the leave-in thermometer into the thickest part of the pork belly. Plug it in to your transmitter and look at the receiver to make sure it is registering a temperature. Now you wait. You want to cook your belly until it reaches an internal temperature of **155°F (68°C)**. **THIS IS CRUCIAL!** It can always go higher than 155°F (68°C), although we don't recommend going past 165°F (74°C), but anything below 155°F (68°C) and you will have bad bacon. A 4-5 Lb belly should take around 2-3 hours and a smaller belly in the 1-3 Lb range should cook in 2 hours or less. The smaller the belly the shorter the cook time and the same goes for the larger the belly the longer the cook time. Therefore, you need a good thermometer to know when it is done.

Smoker Cooking

Start by heating the smoker to 225°F (107°C). You can use any smoker (gas, electric or charcoal) if it allows for precise control of the heat and smoke.

You will want to fill up the water tray in your smoker with boiling water right before you place the belly inside. This steam will help keep the pork belly from drying out. If your smoker does not have a place to put the water, put a small metal pan on the bottom rack of your smoker and fill it with boiling water.

Place your pork belly or bellies in the smoker with the thickest and biggest ones on the bottom or closest to the heat source and work your way up to the smallest or thinnest pork belly. Put each belly fat side down to prevent all the melting fat from pooling on your pork belly while it cooks. This can cool down the meat and make it take longer to finish cooking.

Once you have the smoker loaded up then it is time to add the wood chips. We prefer to use hickory wood for pork bellies and Boston butts. Also, there is no need for any reason to soak your wood chips ahead of time. All this does is make a lot of steam until the water evaporates and causes the temperature inside the smoker to drop. Dry wood burns and smolders better. Do not add more than 4 oz of dry wood chips unless you want people to complain that your bacon “tastes like a camp fire”.

Once Cooked

Once the desired temp of 155°F (68°C) is achieved, remove belly from heat source and allow to cool to room temperature. Do not let it sit out for more than 2 hours before placing in the freezer as this could be ideal conditions for bacteria or other organisms to grow on your pork belly.

Now you can put the belly in a CLEAN gallon size freezer bag or custom sized vacuum sealer bag and freeze. Do not reuse the bag you cured the pork belly in. Give it overnight to get good and frozen. Freezing the whole belly is crucial to being able to slice it easily and keep all your fingers.

Step #3 Slicing:

Remove the pork belly from the freezer and allow it to partially thaw to the point where the ends of the belly are just barely starting to become flexible but the whole thing is still mostly frozen. If it is too thawed it will be a slippery mess and impossible to slice and if it is frozen rock solid, then it will also be impossible to slice, and it will change the final texture if sliced completely frozen.

Using a long knife or preferably an electric deli slicer to slice the bacon with the grain to the thickness you desire. If you are using an electric deli slicer (which we highly recommend) then you can play with the thickness adjustment knob until your desired thickness is achieved.

As you slice the pork belly, stack the bacon slices back onto themselves in the same order you cut them after slicing to make storing and freezing them easier.

There will be some waste that simply is too small to be sliced into whole strips no matter which slicing method you use. These remnants are perfect for freezing and using in dishes like beans and stews when some extra bacon flavor is desired or fried up into bacon bits.

Now that you have sliced all your cured pork belly into slices, you have officially made bacon. Stop and admire your handiwork.

Storing

You will not be able to cook all the sliced bacon from a single 3 Lb belly in one shot. You will have to cook it in multiple batches. Unless you plan on doing this over the next few days, we recommend freezing the remaining bacon to maintain freshness. You didn't put in all that work just to have it go bad in the refrigerator, did you?? Of course not!

At this point you can put the bacon slices back in the bag you froze the whole belly in and it will keep for at least 6 months in the freezer, or you may proceed to cooking the bacon to enjoy.

How To Pre-Cook, Store, and Re-Heat Your Bacon:

Place a baking rack inside an aluminum foil lined jelly roll pan and place the bacon slices on top of the rack. The rack prevents the bacon from sitting in its own fat which helps with three things:

1. It results in crispier bacon and less fat loss versus frying it in a pan on the stove.
2. Creates less mess versus pan frying on the stove.
3. You can collect that precious "liquid gold" bacon grease after you are done cooking the bacon. We always have a jar full of bacon grease in the refrigerator for cooking and nothing tastes better than bacon grease from your own bacon.

Lay out the bacon strips as close to each other without overlapping. Once the pan is as full as you can get it without any overlap, place in oven.

DO NOT PREHEAT THE OVEN. It's been proven that placing raw bacon in a cold oven results in less fat loss from the final cooked product. Place as many trays of bacon in the oven as you can fit. Turn the oven on to 375°F (191°C) and set a timer for 25 minutes.

Remove the bacon from the oven when it is about 3/4 of the way cooked. It will start to take on some rigidity.

If you wish to eat the bacon immediately then after 25 minutes set a timer for a couple more minutes and KEEP AN EYE ON THE BACON until it is cooked to your desired done-ness. It will go from yummy to burnt VERY quickly.

After the bacon has cooled, and using a roll of paper towels, place the bacon across the paper towels without ripping them off the roll. Continue doing this until all the bacon you have is on the paper towels. Do not overlap bacon slices. Roll up the paper towels like a burrito and place in a freezer bag in the refrigerator for later eating.

When you want to eat some bacon, remove the desired number of slices from the refrigerator and reheat in a skillet on medium heat on the stove top or a 350°F (121°C) oven on a foil lined baking sheet with baking rack.

CONGRATULATIONS!! YOU JUST MADE AND ENJOYED YOUR OWN BACON FROM SCRATCH!



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