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Home Cured Prosciutto

In the early days in Sonoma County every Italian house had a basement where a lot of action took place. Children played there. On rainy days the laundry could be hung to dry. In the summer the canning could be done where it was relatively cool (there was always a second stove in the basement.) Some people made wine there. The very well equipped homes also had cellars. Cellars were little storage areas where wines were laid down, apples and potatoes could be stored for later use and Prosciutto could be hung to cure.

We don't have basements or cellars in our homes anymore so if you wish to make prosciutto do it in the winter and hang it from a rafter in your garage, safely protected from any insects or pests*. You won't get arrested if you hang it in your kitchen either if you have a place. It does need to hang someplace for six months with air around it. After that it will keep nicely in your freezer. Modern conveniences make the preparation of prosciutto a snap.

Ingredients

1 fresh leg of pork about 10 to 12 pounds (have the butcher remove the ball joint leaving the rest of the leg bone in)

several large heads of garlic

1/2 pound of peppercorns

3 pounds of salt

large plastic bag big enough to hold the pork and a pan

Directions

Grind garlic in food processor. You need enough garlic paste to spread generously over the whole leg of pork. Grind peppercorns in food processor. Dry leg of pork with paper towels. Spread a thick layer of garlic paste over pork leg on all exposed surfaces. Next pat the pepper thickly into pork leg over the garlic. Finally pat the salt the over the pepper. Be generous with all three applications especially the salt. You want the pork completely encased with the salt as thick as possible. Now you will have to put your leg of pork under refrigeration while the salt draws out the moisture for the curing process. Put the leg on a rack such as is used to cool baked goods and put the rack into a pan. Place the pan and pork into a plastic bag that you can close tightly and put the whole thing into the refrigerator so that the juices drip from the pork into the pan. Keep the pork on a slant propped against the refrigerator wall so that all the juices drain away. Check and drain pan if necessary. Keep the pork under refrigeration for about 32 days. Remove pork from plastic bag. Lay pork on a counter in a pan and cover and press with a very heavy weight for four or five days. Naturally every one who comes into your kitchen will ask what you are doing and will be very impressed. Don't worry about the pork spoiling as it has already been cured by the salt. It is now an Italian ham.

After five days, wash the meat very carefully in several rinses of cold water. Wrap in cheesecloth and hang to dry for about five days. Grind more garlic in the food processor. Grind more peppercorns and place in a separate dish. Cover all exposed surfaces of pork with garlic paste. Next add a layer of pepper. Wrap meat in cheese cloth and tie or sew it neatly so that it can be hung for about six or seven months (the longer it hangs the better it is.) Be the hanging prosciutto is safely protected from any insects or pests*

After hanging, unwrap your prosciutto and debone it. Remove the skin and as much of the fat as possible. It can now be cut into a couple of large chunks be stored wrapped airtight in plastic (double bag it with aluminum foil) in the freezer until you need it. Slice with a slicing machine or serrated knife using a sawing motion. Incidentally do not cut it so thin it tastes like cardboard as is the deplorable custom since the invention of the slicing machine. Prosciuto can be used as an appetizer, not only with figs as in our previous recipe, but with papaya, avacodo, asparagus, melon, and sandwiches. Bring it for picnics with some home made sour dough French bread. Use it to accent main dishes.

***Note:** You may wish to try to find a custom butcher shop with a meat locker and rent some space while the meat is curing.

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