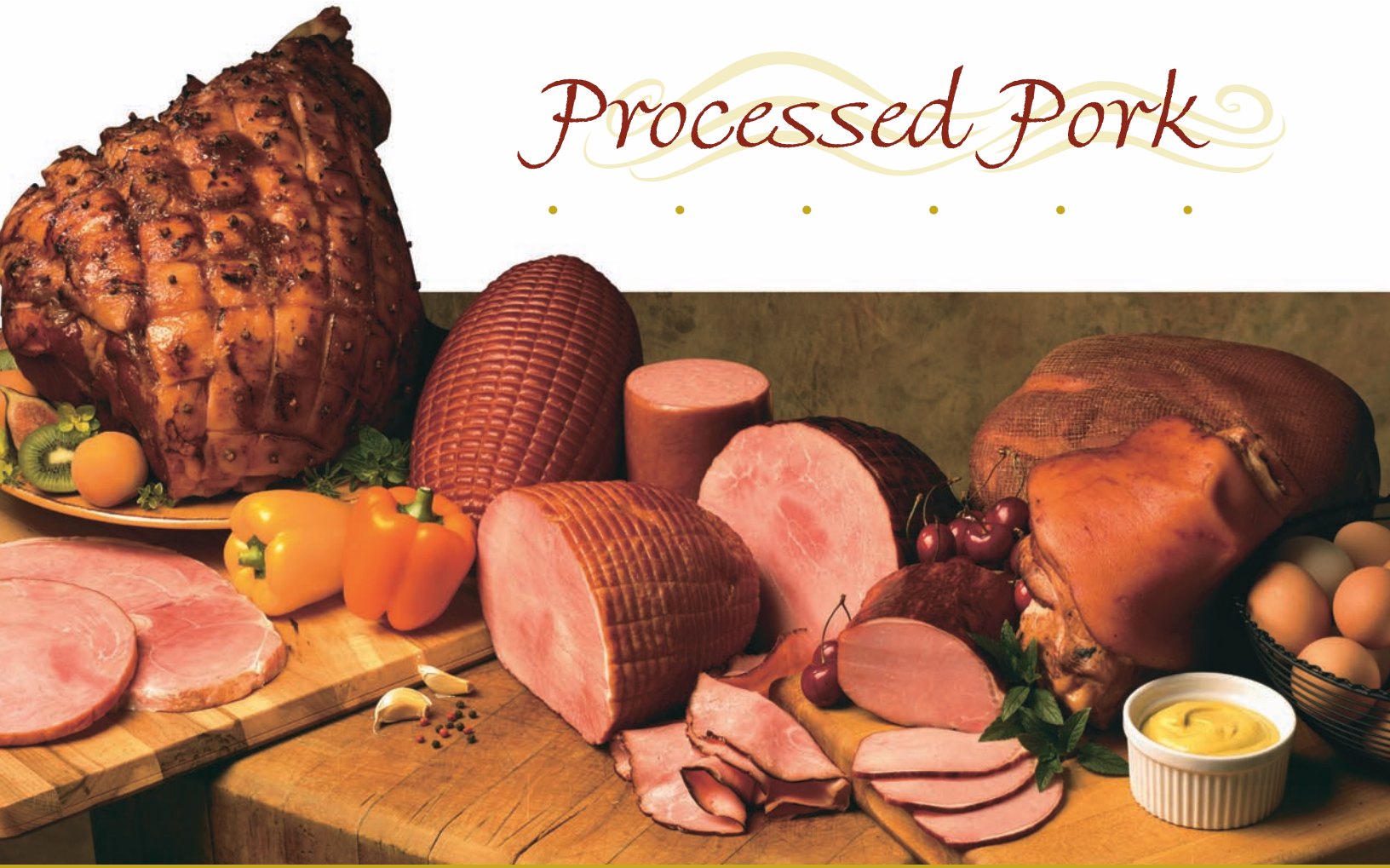


Processed

P O R K



Processed Pork



Most Canadian pork is processed

Most Canadian pork is processed. Only about one third is sold as fresh cuts.

Preserving pork by salting, curing, smoking, or a combination of these, is almost as old as civilisation itself. Preserving pork was originally a method to preserve meat over the winter months. Preserving pork, it was soon noticed, had other benefits. The flavour of cured and smoked pork was highly appreciated, and, over the centuries, a wide range of pork products was developed to satisfy the public demand for pork delicacies.

Each pork-producing country has its own distinctive versions: Westphalian ham from Germany, York ham from England, Salami from Italy, Yunnan ham from China, and Chorizo from Spain, to the point that a comprehensive description of processed pork products would need a large reference book to give it justice.

Here we give a broad outline of the most popular varieties.

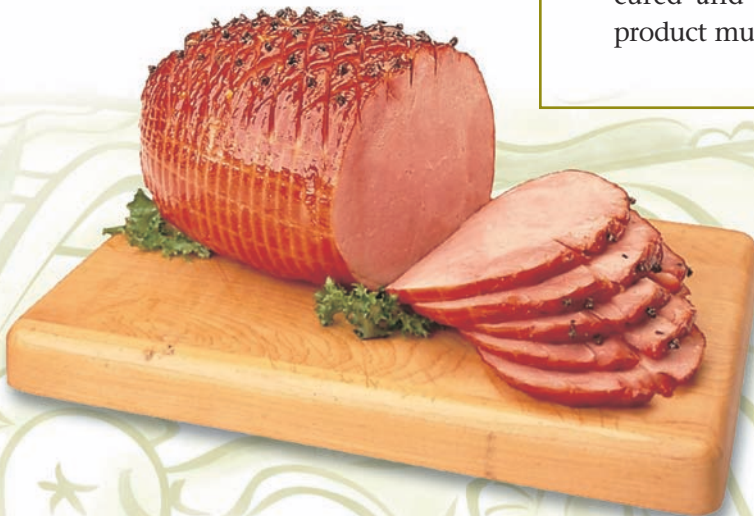


Ham



description

- Ham is the hind leg of a pig, cut from the carcass and cured by salting and drying, and sometimes smoking. This process changes the taste and texture. It also gives ham the ability to be kept for months without deterioration in quality.
- All hams are salted (or “cured”), either with dry salt or a brine. The salt draws out the moisture from the meat and increases the salinity, leaving an environment hostile to bacteria.
- Curing can take from a few days in the case of modern, commercial processors, to months, which is more typical of hams that are eaten raw such as prosciutto.
- Saltpeter (sodium nitrite) is added in small quantities to give a pink colour. Sodium Erythorbate extends shelf life and sodium phosphate aids in binding the water in the brine to the protein molecules. Natural smoke flavour is also added.
- Once cured, dry salted hams are removed from the salt and dried. They are then hung in a temperature and humidity-controlled environment, or smoked. Today’s brine cured hams are lightly smoked and cooked. In traditional wood smoking, the high tannin content of some woods helps to preserve the meat, and each wood type imparts its own particular flavour.
- During the smoking stage, hams lose up to 25 per cent of their weight through evaporation.
- Occasionally the term “ham style” can also be applied to meats other than pork. Other pork cuts – loin and shoulder – are often cured and smoked. Other proteins which make a ham-style product must be declared as Ham-Style Turkey, for example.

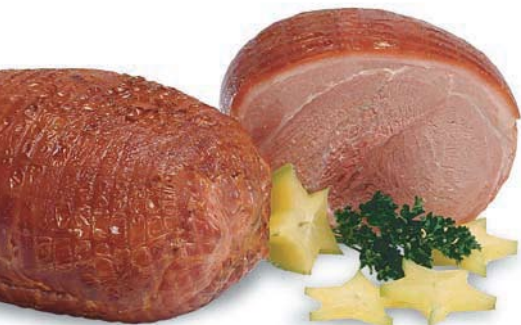


quality

- The quality and value of the ham depends, in part, on the amount of brine absorbed by the ham (the “uptake”). Pork is naturally about 20% protein. In the curing process, some water will be added; in the drying and smoking process, some will be lost. Labels carry a “minimum meat protein” declaration; those items with a higher protein percentage will tend to indicate higher quality (and command higher prices).
- Fresh ham should have a well-marbled lean section, with a firm white layer of fat.
- “Rainbow” appearance: The green or multi-coloured iridescence observable on the cut surface of ham is not a sign of deterioration or spoilage. The effect is caused by a chemical reaction between the curing agents and oxygen.
- Generally, “Country-cured Hams” are bone-in, dry salted and long-aged. Most need to be cooked and are of a superior quality. “Whole Muscle Hams” are boneless, minimally processed, and can be of a high quality. “Dinner Hams” are more highly processed, have greater water content, are not made from whole muscle, and tend to be more bland.



Ham Products



COOKED HAM

These are available in a wide variety.

Bone-in hams are generally the most flavourful. Partially-boned hams have the aitch (pelvis) bone and shank removed. The skin is left on. Boneless whole muscle hams are deboned and skinned. They are netted prior to cooking and smoking to give a particular shape. Black Forest ham is typical of these types of hams.

Canned Ham, Tin-end, Dinner ham, 4 x 4 hams are all terms for hams that contain varying amounts of emulsified pork. They are processed and formed, with a high moisture content and therefore a lower meat protein. Often used for sliced ham in sandwiches, salads, etc.

Toupie Ham: A whole muscle ham with a high moisture content.

Back or Canadian bacon: bears little resemblance to bacon at all. It is the fully-cooked, cured and smoked eye of the loin, and thus very lean.

Smoked Pork Hock: Made from the hind (or ham) shanks, occasionally from the front hock. Fully cooked and smoked, they need a lengthy simmering to tenderize. Both meat and cooking liquid are highly flavoured. A prime ingredient of Canadian Pea Soup.

Smoked Shoulder Picnic: Cured, smoked and usually partially cooked; some may be fully cooked.

Capicola: Cured, smoked and fully cooked boneless shoulder muscle, with the addition of spices.

Smoked Jowl: Cured, smoked and fully cooked. Mainly used as a flavouring agent for simmered dishes.

Kassler: Cured, smoked, bone-in loins. Available whole, or cut into chops. Fully cooked.

Fully cooked hams need to be reheated to 140°F (60°C)

Partially cooked hams need to be cooked to 160°F (70°C)

Partially-cooked hams are usually skin-on, bone in, cured and smoked, but must be cooked to 160°F (70°C) before serving.

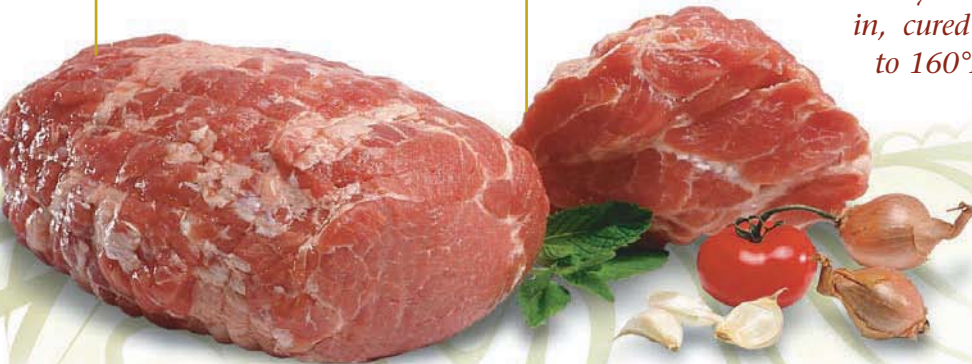
UNCOOKED HAM

Requires Cooking

These hams need soaking and/or boiling to remove excess salt.

“Country-cured”, Smithfield and Virginia: Dry Salt Cured and Smoked.

Cottage Roll: Cured only. Made from the shoulder blade. A very economical item. Requires prolonged simmering until an internal temperature of 160°F (70°C). Can be served hot or cold. The simmering juices make an excellent stock for soups.



HEAVILY CURED AND AIR-DRIED

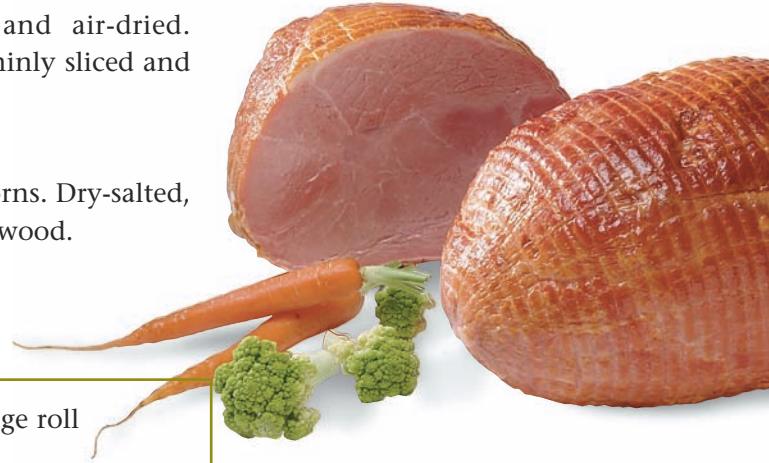
Not cooked. May be smoked or unsmoked. Normally boneless, thinly sliced and eaten raw.

Jambon de Bayonne (France): Seasoned, salted and cold-smoked.

Prosciutto and Parma (Italy): Seasoned, salted and air-dried. Sometimes used in hot dishes, but is more familiar thinly sliced and served with melon and black pepper.

Serrano and Iberica (Spain): Long aged, unsmoked.

Westphalian (Germany). Made from pigs fed with acorns. Dry-salted, then brined. Lightly smoked with beech and juniper wood.

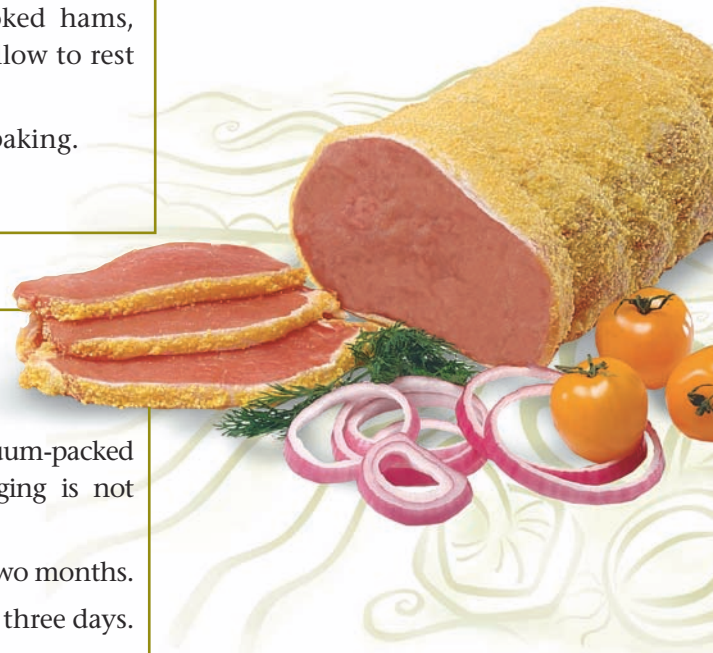


preparation

- Not all ham can be eaten as purchased. Some, cottage roll and ham hocks, among others, have to simmered.
- Salt content: salt levels vary considerably; if a ham is too salty it will have to be soaked in cold water to reduce the salt to a palatable level. Change water every 24 hours until an acceptable salt level is reached.
- Uncooked or partially cooked hams must be cooked to 160°F (70°C) prior to serving.
- Large, bone-in hams can be baked or simmered.
- When simmering ham, add onions, carrots, celery, bay leaves, peppercorns, etc., to the water. Check stock for salt, and use for soup.
- Baking cooked ham: Remove skin and trim fat to ¼ inch. Let ham come to room temperature. Bake at 325° (160°C), fat side up. For partially cooked hams, cook to 160°F (70°C). For cooked hams, cook to 140°F (60°C). For both cooked and uncooked: allow to rest for 15 to 20 minutes before carving.
- Baked ham can be glazed during the final half hour of baking.
- Ham steaks can be grilled, pan-fried, or oven-heated.

storage

- Refrigerate all hams.
- Check labels for “best before” dates.
- Most ham will keep for at least one week refrigerated. Vacuum-packed can be refrigerated for two to three weeks if the packaging is not punctured or damaged.
- Hams like Prosciutto can be stored in a cool place for up to two months.
- Left-over ham should be tightly wrapped and used within three days.
- Freezing is not recommended. The freezing and thawing process diminishes both texture and taste.



Bacon

OTHER BACON VARIETIES

From the belly

Whole Side Bacon: Side bacon sold in one piece, skin on, and unsliced. Dry-cured and with a lower moisture content than regular bacon. A premium product, costing more than regular side bacon.

Green bacon or salt pork belly: Bacon that is cured, but not smoked or cooked, and sold fresh. It is primarily used as a flavouring and is an important ingredient in many dishes throughout the Southern US and New England. Salt pork is usually soaked or blanched to remove excess salt before use.

Pancetta, of Italian origin, is usually rolled, cured, and dried pork belly, but not smoked, with added spices. Use as for normal bacon when the smoky flavour of bacon is not desired.

Bacon bits: Pre-cooked pieces of bacon which are then dried.

From the Loin

Peameal Bacon: Peameal bacon is an Ontario local specialty and quite difficult to source elsewhere. Made from the boneless loin, it is cured in a brine – “sweet pickled” – and rolled in cornmeal (not peameal), giving it its distinctive yellow crust. Peameal bacon is an uncooked item, but, being a loin cut, it has a low fat content; take care not to overcook it. Peameal bacon can be grilled or broiled in slices, or roasted whole.

Bacon, or more accurately “side bacon”, is made from the pork belly with the side ribs removed. It is skinned, cured, and smoked. Nitrates are added for colour and erythorbate as a shelf-life extender. There are, however, other bacon items that are not made from the pork belly.

“Canadian Bacon” is not really a bacon at all and is described under “hams”.

SIDE BACON

Most side bacon is purchased in thin slices, commonly referred to as “hotel” or “restaurant” bacon. Regular slices are approximately $\frac{1}{6}$ of an inch thick and have 16 to 20 slices per pound. Count can vary between 14 to 22 slices per pound.

One half to two-thirds by weight of side bacon is fat. This fat is essential to make cooked bacon crispy and yet tender. Since bacon must be cooked before being served much of the fat is rendered out.

Premium, centre-cut bacon can be purchased; otherwise the whole belly is used (end-to-end).

Flavour can vary considerably depending on processing and curing methods. New flavours are being developed all the time, including pre-cooked varieties. At the food service level, straight-ahead, generic bacon is the rule.

Uses: a breakfast item, ingredient in hamburgers and other fast foods, or for adding flavours to braised items, stews, quiche, and vegetables.

All bacon must be refrigerated.



Pork Sausage

Sausage is typically a chopped meat mixture stuffed into a tubular casing. The overwhelming majority of both fresh and dried sausages are made from either pork only, or pork combined with another type of meat.

There are more varieties of sausage than can be listed here. There are more than 1,000 types of German sausages alone. Generic descriptions only will be given here.

There are three major sausage categories:

- Fresh, which are intended for cooking (breakfast and dinner varieties like Italian style).
- Cooked, and eaten cold (liver sausage, Mortadella) or hot (frankfurters, hot dogs).
- Cured, dried, and sometimes smoked, intended for keeping and slicing (most salamis). Most in this category undergo fermentation during the drying process.

In reality, sausage varieties are far more complicated than this. For example, bratwurst sausage can be sold fresh, cooked, or smoked.



PORK SAUSAGE – FRESH

All fresh pork sausages are made from ground pork, occasionally combined with another meat type, salt and pepper, stuffed into casing and are meant to be consumed within two or three days.

It is not difficult to make sausages in-house. A grinder or meat chopper and a stuffing machine is all that is needed for specialized equipment (see “Specialty Cuts – Ground Pork”).

Commercially-available sausage varies enormously in flavour, size, and quality.

handling and preparation

Pork sausage, in common with all uncooked fresh ground meats, should be used within three days and cooked to well done.

Freezing: up to three months.

CHARCUTERIE

From the French “char cuit”, or cooked meat. It is a term that refers to the establishment that sells cooked meat, specifically pork, and the products themselves. To illustrate, a charcuterie sells terrines, and terrines are typical examples of charcuterie. The person who makes charcuterie is a “charcutier”.

Roughly speaking, charcuterie comprises all the examples of processed pork described here, and many others (terrines, pâtés, galantines, boudins, etc.)

Although of French origin, the term has now entered the English language.

Moisture Enhanced Pork



definition

“Moisture enhanced” (also known as “seasoned”) pork is pork which has been injected with a salt solution (brine) and trace amounts of sodium phosphate (5,000 parts per million).

The sodium phosphate is present to bind the water to the protein molecules in order to lock in the moisture. Some processors use a flavoured pork broth or lemon juice as part of the brine. The amount of liquid added is in the range of 7 to 15 percent.

The process is not designed to add or change flavour, but to enhance the succulence, even if overcooked.

Moisture enhancement was introduced in response to the consumer demand for a pork product that could withstand over-cooking.

Although developed for retail, moisture-enhanced pork has definite advantages for food service. The cooked product tends to be more tender, an important consideration with less tender cuts from the leg and shoulder. In low-fat loin and leg cuts, moisture is retained in the event of over-cooking.

Also, moisture-enhanced pork can be held at 140°F (60°C) for longer periods without undue deterioration of eating quality due to moisture loss.

OTHER PORK PRODUCTS

New pork products appear on the market all the time. Pre-cooked bacon, boneless “ribettes”, cooked and sauced ribs, and so on. To this must be added a vast array of pâtés, terrines, and galantines. This galaxy of products derived from pork is a testament to its endless versatility and popularity.

