

Prosciutto- Parma Style

Traditionally in Italy, prosciutto is made from fresh (unfrozen) pork legs. The Italians have a saying that a good prosciutto only requires four things: Pork, salt, air and time! American pigs are different than the Italian strain and are raised on different meal. It's impossible to duplicate a Parma ham in the states but a good prosciutto can never-the-less be made.

Trimming the Ham: The hams should generally weigh at least 25 pounds and have a very thick layer of fat covering the meat. Remove the hip or "aitch" bone and trim the leg as you desire. Italian hams are traditionally shaped by trimming the meat to a "mandolin" shape; this process generally removes about ¼ of the ham!



Salting the Ham and Salt Stabilization: Chill the ham to about 40°F and salt it as follows. (The salt used is a flaky sea salt; calculate about 4% of the weight of a ham...about ¾ pound of salt for 18 pounds of trimmed ham). *No nitrite/nitrate is used in the traditional preparation, but you may add it for your own peace of mind at the rate of 1 level teaspoon per 5 pounds of ham.* Divide the amount of salt into two piles: one, about 2/3 of the amount; the other, about 1/3 of the amount. Scrub and rub the meat surfaces with the larger amount of salt, making sure to cover all areas of the meat, especially around the bone and hock area. Use some of the salt to rub into the skin surface. Refrigerate meat 2 weeks in a way that any accumulating liquid drains away. Place about 10 pounds of weight on the leg to flatten it out! I place the hams on a slanted board in the chiller with a tub underneath to catch the drippings. After two weeks, rinse (do not soak) the ham and scrub the surface. Pat the surface dry. The rub and scrub in the remaining amount of salt over the meat and a little over the skin and return to refrigeration for another 2 weeks. Add the weight back to the ham. This time allows the salt to be evenly distributed throughout the meat.

Initial Drying: After salting is complete, rinse hams in tepid water to remove excess salt and hang in a well screened area to dry at 75°F at 80% R/H for 24 hours. Remove to aging area and hang hams for 3 months at a temperature that is maintained at about 60°F and 60% R/H. Take caution to keep meat free from flies at this stage; a maggot infestation will eat away at the ham and be un-noticed at this time.

Aging: After the 3 month period, cover the exposed lean areas of meat with a layer of a thick paste comprised of pork lard and finely ground black or white pepper and semolina or rice flour. Note: some processors add a little boric acid to the mixture to prevent souring by insects; I didn't. Work the paste into all crevices of the ham, especially around the hock. Allow the aging to continue this way for at least 10 more months! It's not unusual to age the prosciutto for up to 18 months or more. Periodically pierce the ham near the bone with a bone needle and smell the aroma; Re-paste the hole! It should have a pleasant smell...if not, and it smells sour or unpleasant, the ham is spoiled and will not recover!

Production Photos are on the next page.

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