



## ***Food Safety & Preservation:***

# **Meat/Poultry Jerky**

*SP 50-535, Revised May 2009*

### **Selection of Meat**

The best jerky is made from lean meat. The leaner the meat, the better the finished product. Either fresh or frozen meat can be used.

#### **Beef**

Select lean beef. Good or utility grade will be leaner than choice or prime meat. Good cuts for jerky are the flank, round, sirloin or rump cuts.

**Caution: Ground beef should not be used because of safety concerns.**

#### **Game Meats**

Most game meats can be used. Venison, elk and antelope make excellent jerky. Game meats used for jerky should be frozen for at least 60 days at 0°F. as a precaution against parasites before drying. Any cut of game meat can be used, but the loin, round and flank make the best jerky.

#### **Poultry and Rabbit**

Turkey breasts, thighs, and legs are the best cuts for making jerky. The loin of the rabbit is also good. Be sure to skin the meat and remove all the fat.

### **Preparation of the Meat, Poultry**

Freeze meat before preparing so that it will be easier to slice.

Cut partially thawed meat into long slices that are no more than ¼ inch thick. For tender jerky, cut at a right angle to long muscles (“across the grain”). Remove all the fat possible to prevent off-flavors.

### **Precooking the Meat\***

Meat and poultry to be used for jerky must be heated to a safe temperature to kill harmful E. coli O157:H7 and salmonellae bacteria. Unless jerky is heated to 160°F., these bacteria can survive. Because most home dehydrators and smokers aren’t designed to reach this temperature, the jerky must be heated in another way to guarantee safety. This can be done by precooking. Precooking in marinade shortens the drying time and makes a more tender jerky. Although the color and texture will be different from conventional jerky, precooked jerky is still tasty.

Prepare 1-2 cups of marinade of your choice in a sauce pan. Bring the marinade to a full rolling boil over medium heat. Add a few meat strips, making sure that they are covered by marinade. Re-heat to a full boil.

Remove the pan from the range. Using tongs, immediately remove meat from the hot marinade to prevent over-cooking.

Repeat steps until all meat has been precooked. Add more marinade if needed.

**Caution:** Soaking the meat strips in marinade overnight is not advised. Bacteria will be spread in the kitchen when the marinated strips are drained before precooking. Putting unmarinated strips directly into boiling marinade minimizes a cooked flavor and maintains safety.

### **Sample Marinade**

Marinade ingredients usually include soy sauce and salt. Sometimes cider or wine is added. Seasonings could include garlic, onion, pepper, sugar, or smoke flavoring.

Try this recipe or use it as a guide:

- 1 cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
- 4 tsp. garlic salt
- 4 tsp. seasoning pepper
- 4 tsp. liquid smoke flavoring

### **Drying the Jerky**

Place precooked strips in a single non-overlapping layers on drying racks.

Dry in a dehydrator or smoker. Test for doneness by letting a piece cool. When cool, it should crack but not break when bent. There should not be any moist or underdone spots.

### **Storing the Jerky**

Refrigerate the jerky overnight in a plastic freezer bag. Then check again for doneness. If necessary, dry further. Keep jerky in the refrigerator or freeze for long-term storage.

\*The University of Georgia has suggested oven heating after drying as an alternative to pre-cooking. Precooking in marinade has a wider margin of safety for bacterial destruction, however. To heat in the oven, place dried strips on a baking sheet, close together, but not touching or overlapping. For strips originally cut ¼ inch thick or less, heat 10 minutes in an oven pre-heated to 275°F. (Thicker strips may require more time to reach 160°F.)

**Note:** Jerky can be made with reduced or no salt. Any combination of seasonings can be used for flavor, including low-sodium soy sauce. Because salt helps preserve the meat and draws out the moisture, lower salt jerky may take longer to dry and won't keep as well. Jerky made without salt should be stored in the freezer and used soon after thawing.

Source: Family Food Education Program