

New Venison Jerky Procedure

Home-prepared venison jerky was recently identified as the cause of a foodborne illness outbreak in Oregon. The small electric dehydrator that was used hadn't reached a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria.

E. coli O157:H7 bacteria can grow in the intestines of deer and contaminate meat during handling. To kill these bacteria, jerky must be heated to 160°F., while it is still moist. Because most home dehydrators 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.

Note: Research is needed to identify other safe jerky-making procedures. To date, there is no safe procedure for the dry cure method.

To precook venison jerky

1. Freeze game meat before preparing so that it will be easier to slice.
2. Cut partially thawed meat into long slices that are no more than ¼" thick. For tender jerky, cut at a right angle to long muscles ("across the grain"). Remove all the fat possible to prevent off-flavors.
3. Prepare 1-2 cups of marinade of your choice in a large sauce pan.
4. 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.
5. Remove the pan from the range. Using tongs, immediately remove meat from the hot marinade to prevent over-cooking.
Repeat steps 4 and 5 until all meat has been precooked. Add more marinade if needed.
6. Place precooked strips in single non-overlapping layers on drying racks.
7. 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.

8. 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.

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.

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