

Care and Cooking of Virginia Beach 4-H Salt Cured Show Hams

Calvin A. Schiemann

Retired Extension Agent, City of Virginia Beach

Care of Ham exhibited in 4-H Show: If the show ham will not be cooked for sometime, it should be cleaned, oiled, coated with pepper and wrapped in brown paper to continue aging. Simply wipe the ham with a damp cloth to remove any dust from the show.

Lightly oil the ham with cooking oil. Then coat the ham with pepper, especially the meat side. This helps prevent insects from attacking the ham. Wrap the ham in brown paper - Do not wrap in plastic. Seal the paper edges with tape. Hanging a ham is the preferred method for storing

Two heavy, brown paper grocery bags, without rips and tears, can be used to wrap a ham. Place the ham in the first bag and tightly fold and seal the top. Place into a second bag and seal top.

Caution: Do not wrap or store hams in plastic wrap or plastic bags!

Non-Show Hams: Hams that were not cleaned and entered in the show should continue to age in the original cotton mesh bags – no need to oil or add more pepper. They can be wrapped in brown paper as described to help prevent insect damage.

Aging Hams: These hams are five months old at the time of the show and have excellent flavor. Hams can be cooked now or continue to age. After wrapping, hang in a cool, dry, protected room. Aging time is important, as this is when the characteristic country ham flavor is developed. Maximum flavor is reached at 9 - 12 months of age, perfect for the Thanksgiving - Christmas Holiday Season. Hams can be kept beyond one year but become firmer and dryer with time.

Cooking a Salt Cured Country Ham: A cold ham is easier to carve than a warm or hot ham. Cook the ham at least one day before carving. Aged hams usually have a lot of surface mold (white, gray, black). **Mold is not a problem!** Scrub ham with a brush to remove mold and pepper. Many cooks like to soak a ham before cooking. However, soaking is not necessary before cooking. Cover ham with cool water for 12 – 24 hours. Change water once or twice if desired.

Simmer Method: Place in a deep kettle or roasting pan, fat side down, and cover with water. Bring water to 185 degrees F. and simmer for 18 - 25 minutes per pound or until internal ham temperature is 155 degrees F. on a meat thermometer. Add warm/hot water as necessary to keep ham covered. When done, remove from water; remove skin and fat while ham is warm.

Baking: Wash, scrub and soak overnight as described above. Wrap in heavy-duty aluminum foil and join edges carefully. Add 4 cups water within the foil. Place in a pan for support and place in oven. Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Cook ham at 300 degrees for 20 minutes per lb. or until meat thermometer reads 150 degrees F. in thickest part of ham. Remove from oven and let cool 1 hour. Remove skin and fat. Sprinkle with brown sugar and breadcrumbs (optional) and bake until brown (approximately 15 minutes).

Carving Ham:

Use a **very sharp** knife and cut **very thin slices**. The thinner the slice the better the taste! While ham is warm from cooking, remove fat and skin. If possible, carve ham after it has completely cooled. Place ham fat side up. Begin slicing about 2 inches from small end. Make first cut straight through to the bone. Slant the knife slightly for each succeeding cut. Decrease slant as slices become larger.

Thick ham slices will taste very salty and are difficult to eat. Paper-thin slices are best!