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how to make canadian bacon at home

One thing above all others makes my kids happy: Canadian Bacon and Pineapple Pizza. (I'll admit, I'm fond of it, too.) So, confident in [my general bacon-making abilities](#) I embarked on a *Canadian* Bacon making experiment.

I'm happy to report that homemade Canadian Bacon is, if anything, even *easier* than belly bacon and tastes great in all sorts of things – diced up with eggs, sliced thin on a sandwich, cubed up in a soup with beans. And, yes, it makes a damned fine pizza topping.



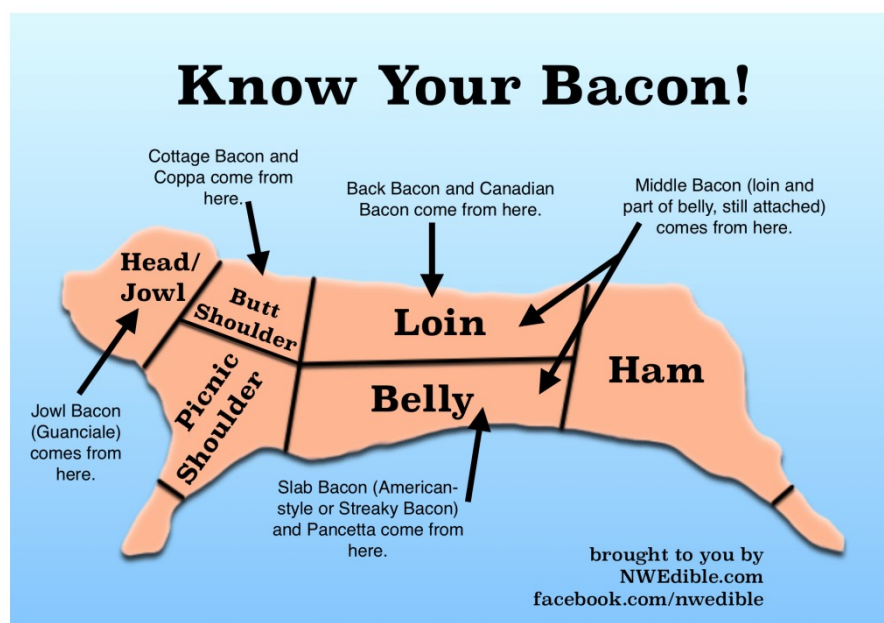
a bacon by any other name

In the United States we think of bacon as the cured, smoked belly of a pig. What we Americans call Canadian Bacon is brine-cured, smoked pork loin. It's closer to "Back Bacon" and has a texture more like lean ham than belly bacon.

Canadian Bacon has nothing to do with Canada as far as I can tell – maybe some of my readers North of the border can chime in. In Canada there is a

traditional product called peameal bacon which is a brined, unsmoked pork loin rolled in yellow crushed dried peas or cornmeal. I think this is what evolved into what we here in 'Murica know as Canadian Bacon.

In any event, what we'll be making today is made from the loin of a pig, and it's both delicious and very straightforward.



ok! let's get started!

Making Canadian Bacon at home is easy – if you've ever brined a Thanksgiving turkey, this is way less hassle than that.

You'll need a whole pork loin. The loin is a lean, cylindrical muscle tucked right up alongside the spine. It's a common cut that is easy to find at good butchers, grocery or warehouse-type store. If you buy or raise your pig as a whole or half animal think a bit about if you are willing to give up the other premium cuts from the loin primal to make Canadian Bacon. Those include pork loin roasts, loin chops and pork porterhouse steaks.

You'll need common ingredients and spices. Details in the actual recipe.

Just like when we made [belly bacon](#), we need pink curing salt and a way to smoke the pork. These two require a bit of planning ahead, so here's what you should consider.

1. pink salt

Pink salt is a special curing salt that includes sodium nitrite. It keeps cured products safe from botulism, and makes your Canadian Bacon pink and juicy instead of pork-chop colored. Order it online. [This is what I use.](#)

This recipe calls for what seems like an insane amount of pink salt, and I'll admit I balked a bit at the quantity involved when I first tested this recipe. After researching, I learned that wet brine cures for items like Canadian Bacon and ham require a much larger amount of pink salt than items like belly bacon that get cured with a dry rub. The reason is simple dilution from the water content of the brine.

If nitrites really freak you out, as long as you keep this product refrigerated at all reasonable times during curing and processing, the total smoking time is less than 2 hours, you keep your smoked pork loin refrigerated and freeze the extra, you *can* skip the pink salt. But what you make *won't* be Canadian bacon – it'll be smoke-roasted pork. Still super delicious, but more perishable and not quite the same, flavor-wise.

The only thing about pink salt that bothers *me* is the dye that turns it pink. The actual nitrites themselves don't worry me at all. I've included my footnotes on pink salt and nitrates from the belly bacon tutorial at the end of this post so you can see where I stand and then make your own decision.

2. smoker and woodchips

I've made this Canadian bacon, or slight variations of it, three times now. In the photos that follow you'll see me using the small "Little Chief" Electric Smoker given to me years ago by my sister and brother-in-law. It's an older version of [this model](#). We have since upgraded to an electric smoker ([this](#)

[one](#)) and OMG the difference is incredible. We've run a lot of smoked meat since we got our new [smoker](#) and it's done just great.

My dad came over and said our smoker reminded him of the set-up *his* father had. My grandpa converted a broken refrigerator (or maybe upright freezer) into a smoker by drilling a couple of holes into it and adding an electric hot-plate to the bottom. The chips sat on a tin pie plate on top of the hot plate. So if you are handy, you might be able to rig-up a DIY smoker on the cheap.

(Personal side note: my grandpa grew the best tomatoes I've ever eaten, spray-painted every tool he ever owned bright red and liked to say "You need to have a certain amount of shit hanging around." When he passed away, my father opened up his garage. It was jam-packed with an uncountable number of things, all painted red.)

If you like this sort of thing, eventually you'll want your own fancy smoker – something insulated with adjustable temperature controls and an auto-shut off timer. But in the meantime, there are a bunch of other ways to rig up a temporary smoker. Here are a few:

- [Weber style grill smoker](#)
- [Flower pot smoker](#)
- [Stovetop smoker](#)

For wood, I used bags of hardwood apple chips from the grocery store, like [these](#). They aren't too expensive. I used maybe a quarter of a \$5 bag to smoke a full pork loin. Apple wood with pork is a natural, but use what you like.

making canadian bacon: step by step with photos

Make your brine. This is as simple as bringing all the ingredients up to a simmer just to ensure all the salt is dissolved. I've played around with slight variations on the aromatics in the brine and all versions have turned out well. You can also scale this brine as needed. Just keep the ratio of water, salt, sugar and pink salt the same. Let the brine cool *all the way* and pop it in the fridge to chill before you use it.



While your brine is cooling, meet your meat!

Get yerself a full pork loin. It should weigh about 10 pounds. A bit more or less isn't that big of deal, but if you have some massive 14 pound pork loin, you may have to cut it into thirds and scale up the brine to compensate. Alternatively, if ten pounds of Canadian bacon sounds intimidating, halve the brine quantity and use a 4 or 5 pound center-cut pork loin roast instead of the full loin.

Trim up the pork loin. After some debate with myself I left the silverskin on the loin on this batch. I wanted to keep that thin layer of fat. This was a risk – silverskin can be impossibly chewy but it turned out fine – no rubber band quality. So I say trim your pork loin and remove visible silverskin but don't strip it of fat to do so.



If you are using the full loin, cut it in half as shown below and place each half in a heavy-duty, gallon-size zip-top plastic bag. If you are using a 4 or 5 pound roast, you'll only need one bag. Duh.



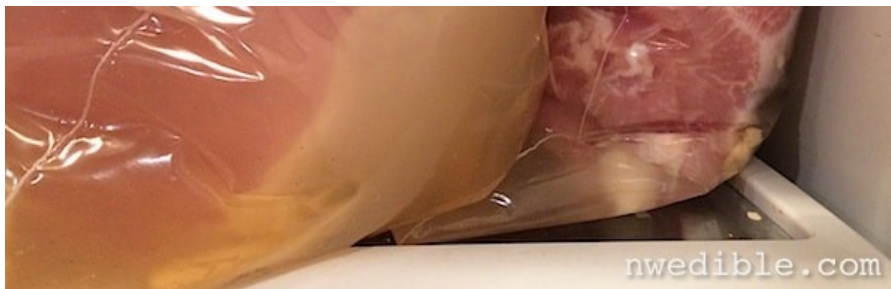


Add the cold brine to the bags with the pork loin, dividing up the brine equally and trying to get the aromatics more-or-less evenly represented in the bags, too. Squeeze as much extra air out as you can and try to get the meat fully surrounded by the brine.



Pop the brining pork loin in the fridge and leave it there for 3 to 4 days. If your chunk of pork loin is small, err on the side of a little less time and if it's jumbo, err on the side of a little more time. Don't exceed 5 days though or your loin will be too salty. Once a day, or when you think of it, give the bag a little flip to keep the meat brining evenly.





When Brine Time is up, it's time for the fun part: drying and smoking. Before you smoke meat (or fish), the outside of the meat should be so dry that it feels a bit tacky. This layer of dry meat is called the pellicle and is important for good smoke flavor and color. To form the pellicle, you've got two options:

Pellicle Option #1: Slow, Easy and Health Department Approved

Rinse off your brined pork loin, then pat dry with a lint free towel. Set the loin pieces on a cooling rack set over a sheetpan and place the loin pieces uncovered in the refrigerator for a day or so.

Pellicle Option #2: Faster, More Work, Freaks Out The Health Department People

Rinse off your brined pork loin, then pat dry with a lint free towel. Set the loin pieces on a cooling rack set over a sheetpan and place the loin pieces on your counter. Set a big fan in front of the loin pieces and dry them in front of the fan, turning the loin pieces periodically so they dry uniformly.

Your loin isn't going to spoil, since it just spent 4 days absorbing salt and nitrite, but don't be stupid. Don't dry your pork at room temp in summer in Arizona in a house without AC. And don't let the drying go on more than two hours or so – if you don't have a powerful fan that can get the job done in that timeframe, go with the Slow Dry Method.

Whatever method you opt for, make sure the pork loin has full air flow all around it and isn't touching anything.



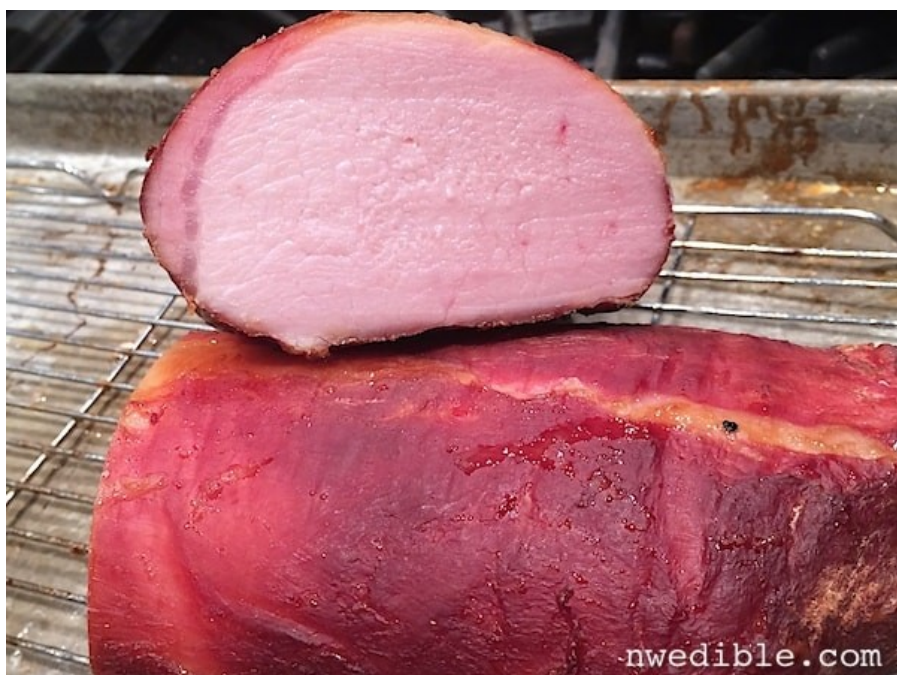
Now it's time to smoke! Get your smoker set up and loaded with applewood chips or your chips of choice. Different smokers require slightly different set-ups, so just follow the instructions for your particular smoker. I use dry smoke. As a reader commented on the big bacon post, dry *smokes* and wet *steams*.



Load your brined, dry pork loin into your smoker and hot smoke until the pork hits an internal temperature of 150-degrees. If you are using a smoker with a temperature control, set your smoker to somewhere around 225-degrees.



When your Canadian bacon is fully cooked but juicy with a beautiful smoked exterior, remove it from the smoker.

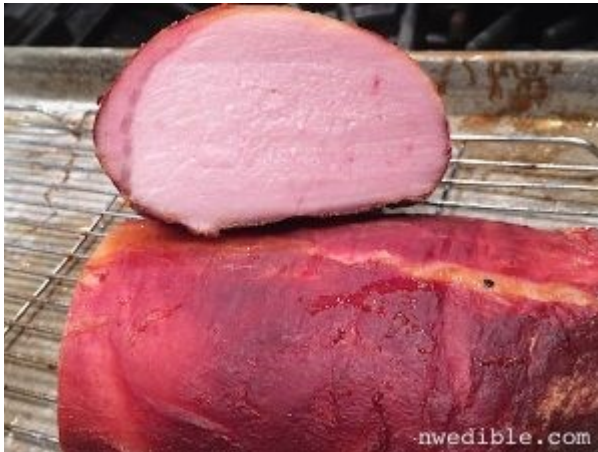


If you possibly contain yourself, wrap the Canadian bacon well and let it chill well before slicing into it. I did not have that level of self control. This stuff is incredible. It will last for a few weeks in the fridge, and if you wrap it well in reasonable-sized hunks you can freeze it for 6 months.



printable canadian bacon recipe

Adapted very lightly adapted from Micheal Ruhlman's [Canadian Bacon recipe](#) at [Ruhlman.com](#)



[PRINT](#)

Canadian Bacon At Home

author: erica

Ingredients

For the Brine

- 1 gallon water
- 6.4 oz salt (This is 1-1/4 cups of the Diamond Crystal brand Kosher salt I use)
- 40 grams / 3 tablespoons pink salt (6.25% sodium nitrite curing salt)
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 8 garlic cloves, peeled and rough chopped
- 4 fresh or dried bay leaves
- 1 tbsp dried thyme, or a generous handful of fresh thyme

- 1 tbsp whole black peppercorn
- Juice of 2 lemons

For the Canadian Bacon

- 1, 8-to-10 pound pork loin

Instructions

1. Combine all the brine ingredients in a large, non-reactive pot. Stirring occasionally, heat the brine over medium heat until the salt and sugar are fully dissolved. Let the brine cool, then pop it in the fridge to chill.
2. While your brine is chilling, trim the pork loin of any excess fat and slice in half to form two, 4-to-5 pound cylinders. Put each piece of pork loin in a heavy duty, gallon-size freezer bag. Divide the brine and the aromatics evenly between the bags, squeeze out excess air and seal the bags well.
3. Brine the pork in the the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days, flipping the pork periodically to ensure an even brine.
4. Rinse and dry the pork, then allow to dry to form a pellicle.
5. Hot smoke the pork at 200 degrees until the internal temperature of the pork reaches 150 degrees.

footnote: pink salt, prague powder, nitrites, etc.

Regular readers will remember this footnote from it's original appearance in the [Giant DIY Bacon Tutorial](#). If you already know my take on this stuff, feel free to skip.

Pink Salt, also called Prague Powder, InstaCure or DQ Salt is a curing salt. You don't use it for flavoring or seasoning – you use it to preserve meat and a little goes a long way.

It's called Pink Salt because it is dyed pink so no one mistakes it for table salt. *It is not the same as Himalayan pink salt!* I saw a website telling people they needed to use Himalayan Pink Salt to cure their meats and I almost choked on my slab of pate. Not the same thing! So, to emphasize: Himalayan salt – or any other fancy boutique finishing salt of any color at all – is *not* what you need here.

There are two standard formulations of curing salt.

Prague Powder #1 (also called InstaCure #1 and DC Cure #1) contains table salt and 6.25% sodium *nitrite* and is used for sausages, cured meats, pates, deli meats, et.c that are cooked – smoked, baked, roasted, canned, whatever. Basically any cured meat that isn't long-aged like a dry-cured salami. *This is what we use when we make Canadian bacon.* You can get it [here](#).

Prague Powder #2 (also called InstaCure #2) is used for long aged dry-cured meats like prosciutto and hard salami. It has table salt, sodium *nitrite* (6.25%) and sodium *nitrate* (1%). The *nitrate* acts as a kind of slow-release preservative for very long-cured meats. We don't use it to make bacon or other short-cured items.

“Wait!” I hear some of you saying, “Nitrites! Oh my God, evil toxic additives.” Hold on a second – before you slam your laptop lid in disgust, let me break down my position on Pink Salt for you.

Remember our old frienemy Mr. Botulism Toxin? (See: [How Not To Die of Botulism](#)) Did you know that botulism was first described “as a ‘sausage poison’ and ‘fatty poison’, because the bacterium that produces the toxin often caused poisoning by growing in improperly handled or prepared meat products.” ([Wikipedia](#).) Even botulism's *name* comes from a cured meat product: botulus is Latin for sausage.

Sodium nitrite in the form of pink salt, when used according to established standards, prevents the growth of *C. Botulinum* and the development of the botulism toxin in cured meats. That's why it's in there. As an added bonus, the nitrite enhances color, flavor, and texture in the cured meat.

Okay, so on one hand we have this established risk of botulism growth in improperly cured meat products. On the other hand we might have the potential risk of nitrites. So we have to ask ourselves, what is the risk from nitrites when used according to established guidelines? I believe the answer is – little to none, but of course this is something you should investigate if it concerns you. For more info, I recommend [The “No Nitrites Added” Hoax](#) by Micheal Ruhlman. I am, personally, firmly in the pro-Pink Salt category.

related stuff...

(These are affiliate links. Full financial disclosure [here](#).)

[Charcuterie: The Craft of Salting, Smoking, and Curing](#) and [Salumi: The Craft of Italian Dry Curing](#), both by Michael Ruhlman. If you want to go deeper into cured meats, you would be hard pressed to find a more enthusiastic guide than Ruhlman in these two books. Also check out his [excellent personal website](#).

[Pink Salt](#). Remember, you want Prague #1 for Canadian bacon and everything cured that isn't long-dried. This link goes to the same pink salt I use.

[Wood Chips](#). I like Applewood because it's mild and has a fruity note that complements pork wonderfully. But play around – there are [lots of different kinds](#) of smoking wood.

[Dedicated Smoker](#). If you have the room and the funds, there are a lot of options out there. I love my [Masterbuilt Electric Smoker](#) and can