

## Corned Beef

by Catherine Haug

### Corning

Corned beef and cabbage has become a St. Patrick's Day tradition all across America. But corned beef is good any time of the year!

Corning meat is an ancient method of preserving meat, either a dry cure by surrounding the meat with coarse salt, or a wet cure by soaking it in a flavored salt brine. The term 'corn' comes from the old English term for grains of salt.

The salt brine draws moisture out of the meat, making a less favorable environment for bacterial growth. As moisture is drawn out, salt is drawn in, deeper and deeper into the meat, drying it out and preserving it. Do NOT use iodized salt--the cured meat will taste bad. Your best choice is Koshering (Kosher) salt. Celtic sea salt is too expensive for this use.

While some recipes indicate using a large metal saucepan, I would suggest using a porcelain-coated stock pot, large glass bowl, or stoneware crock (non-lead glaze) for the brining. A good heavy stainless steel pot will work in a pinch.

### The Saltpeter Dilemma

Commercial corned beef has a red color, due to the use of saltpeter in the brining liquid. Saltpeter acts as an additional preservative against botulism, necessary if you intend to keep your preserved meat in a root cellar. But as a nitrate salt, it is believed to be carcinogenic, as well as other negative health effects, and not recommended if you can keep your corned meat in a freezer.

Without the saltpeter your corned beef will just be a brown-gray like any other pot roast, instead of the familiar red corned beef.

### Keeping Time

Corned beef with its pickling juices will keep in the refrigerator 5 - 7 days. If you drain off the juices, it will keep up to a month, according to several sources.

However, in older times before refrigeration, salting (corning) was used to preserve meat for longer periods of time. In colder areas it would keep all winter (with brine juices drained off). A Texas website ([www.6thtx.org/](http://www.6thtx.org/)) indicates salt-cured meat will keep outdoors in a Texas summer for at least 5 days; up here in Montana, it may even keep longer. (This same website has lots of good tips).

### BRAISED CORNED BEEF BRISKET

A classic corned beef preparation, this recipe includes instructions for a salt brine cure, as well as braising the cured brisket with or without cabbage and potatoes in the pot.

The thicker the cut of brisket, the longer it takes to cure. 4 days is good for a thin cut. The cooking process must include fresh, unsalted water, which then draws the salt back out of the meat and replaces the moisture that was removed during the curing process.

You can use commercial pickling spices, or make your own mix; for example:

1 Tbsp each whole mustard & coriander seeds, 1/2 Tbsp each whole cloves & juniper berries

## **Corning the Beef**

### **Ingredients:**

- 4.5 - 5 pounds of beef brisket
- 4 quarts filtered water
- 3 cups [kosher salt](#)
- 2 Tbsp Rapadura sugar, or maple syrup
- 1/4 tsp saltpeter (optional)
- Spices (use half quantity for brine, half for cooking):
  - 4 bay leaves, crushed
  - 16 peppercorns
  - 4 - 5 tsp pickling spices
  - 4 garlic cloves, crushed and halved
  - 1 onion, rough-chopped (optional)

### **Equipment:**

- large saucepan
- large glass or ceramic bowl into which you can fit a weighted plate (weight with canned goods)

### **Method:**

1. Trim all but 1/4 inch of fat from meat; cut into 2 or more pieces (optional). Wash and pat dry; rub with 1/4 cup salt
2. Heat water, salt and sugar in saucepan; stir to dissolve. Test for amount of salt (see 'egg test' below).
3. Place brisket in a large bowl; pour salted water over.
4. Add half the bay leaves, peppercorns, pickling spice, garlic cloves, and onions (optional). Place weighted plate over to keep meat completely immersed.
5. Refrigerate 4 - 12 days, turning brisket over every two days (thicker briskets need longer time).
6. Remove meat and rinse thoroughly. If meat is rubbery, you can de-salt by soaking in several changes of cold water, up to 24 hours.

## **Braising the Corned Beef**

### **Ingredients & Equipment:**

- fresh, unsalted boiling water
- remaining half of spices and garlic
- optional veggies:
  - 1/2 large or 1 small head cabbage, cut into wedges
  - 2 - 6 red-skinned potatoes, scrubbed
  - 3 - 6 carrots, cut in 2" lengths
- covered casserole dish

### **Method:**

1. Place meat in casserole and cover with boiling water. Add remaining bay leaves, peppercorns, spices and garlic.
2. Cover and braise (cook in slow oven, 275 - 300° F), about 1 - 1.5 hours or more per pound, until fork tender.
3. Add wedges of cabbage & other veggies during the last 20 minutes of cooking, if desired.

### **Assembly or Serving Suggestions**

- Serve with boiled cabbage, carrots and potatoes.
- Instead of boiled cabbage and potatoes, try *culcannon* (mashed potatoes and cabbage or kale) for a side dish.
- Chill in cooking liquid, then slice thinly for sandwiches, with rye bread and mustard.

### **Egg Test for Correct Amount of Salt in Brine**

Place an uncooked egg (in the shell) into the brine. If it floats, there is enough salt. If it does not float, add and dissolve a half-cup of salt at a time, testing with the egg after each addition.

## RAW CORNED BEEF

This is a very tasty way to add raw meat to your diet. Just be sure to freeze the meat for at least 14 days to kill any parasites that might be hiding in the meat. Thaw before brining.

The addition of whey provides a longer shelf life than corning with just salt, and also allows you to eat it raw. It should keep in a cool spot (without refrigeration) up to a week; in the refrigerator about 10 days, not more than 2 weeks. [From Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions*].

### **Ingredients & Equipment:**

- one 2-pound beef brisket (frozen for 14 days, then thawed)
- 1/2 cup [whey](#) (see sidebar)
- 1 cup filtered water
- 3 1/2 Tbsp [kosher salt](#)
- 1 tablespoon mustard seeds
- 4 - 5 bay leaves, crumbled
- 1 Tablespoon juniper berries, crushed
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- bowl fitted with weighted plate (use canned goods or rock(s) as weights)

### **Method**

1. Mix seasonings and rub onto all sides of the brisket. Place in a bowl that just contains brisket.
2. Mix whey with water and pour over meat. Cover with weighted plate, and marinate at room temperature for about 2 days, turning frequently.
3. Transfer to refrigerator for keeping.

### **Serving Suggestions**

- Use for sandwiches, with rye bread and mustard
- Use for corned beef hash

### **How to make whey**

- You will need a very fine sieve and a bowl. You can buy a yogurt cheese sieve made for this purpose, or line a large strainer with a fine 100% cotton dish towel (or real cheesecloth).
- Pour cultured milk (yogurt, buttermilk, kefir, etc.) into sieve, set over bowl. Cover. If using pasteurized milk/cream, place in refrigerator; if using raw milk/cream, keep at room temperature. The whey will separate and drip through sieve.

## CORNED BEEF HASH (for 2)

This recipe, from *Nourishing Traditions*, is a great way to use leftover corned beef. Serve it with an egg or two, cooked sunny side up.

### **Fermenting the Potatoes**

#### **Ingredients & Equipment:**

- 2 medium potatoes, washed
- filtered water
- 1/4 cup whey
- 1 Tbsp [Celtic sea salt](#)
- small bowl
- tea towel

#### **Method:**

1. Cut raw potatoes into small julienne, using a food processor, by hand.
2. Place in a bowl with water, whey and salt. Press potatoes down to cover entirely with water. Cover bowl and soak overnight.
3. Pour out water, skim off top layer of potatoes (which will have turned brown).
4. Drain remaining potatoes and place in a tea towel and wring out thoroughly.

## **Hash**

### **Ingredients & Equipment:**

- 1/2 cup finely chopped corned beef
- 1/2 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 red bell pepper, seeded and cut into julienne
- 1 1/2 Tbsp butter
- 1 1/2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- [Celtic sea salt](#) and fresh ground pepper, to taste
- large cast iron or enameled cast iron skillet

### **Method**

1. Mix chopped corned beef, onion and red pepper with potatoes (after they have been squeezed dry).
2. Melt butter and olive oil in a large cast iron skillet.
3. Place hash mixture in pan and press down firmly. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
4. Cover pan and cook over medium heat about 5 minutes.
5. Turn and cook, covered, another 5 minutes, or until potatoes are well browned.

### **Serving Suggestions**

- For breakfast, poach or saute 1 or 2 eggs per person in butter (sunny-side up) and place on top of serving of hash.

#### Sources:

- [www.recipezaar.com/85332](http://www.recipezaar.com/85332)
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- [http://ct.essortment.com/howtomakecorn\\_rlqm.htm](http://ct.essortment.com/howtomakecorn_rlqm.htm)
- [www.texascooking.com/features/mar2002cornedbeef.htm](http://www.texascooking.com/features/mar2002cornedbeef.htm) (lots of good info)
- [www.6thtx.org/Salting%20Meat.htm](http://www.6thtx.org/Salting%20Meat.htm) (more good info)