



THE BREAKFAST CURE

Don't bring home the bacon, make it

There's nothing quite like the smell of bacon frying. Whether anchoring a BLT or sitting sidecar to eggs, bacon has amassed a frenzied following as one of America's most beloved foods, yet few attempt to cure their own. While Charlestonians were heartbroken when cured meat haven Artisan Meat

Share shuttered earlier this year, chef Bob Cook transitioned to Edmund's Oast, another Holy City hot spot known for its charcuterie. We turned to Cook for his recipe for a simple dry cure that transforms pork belly into bacon slabs, along with a few tips for the process. Be sure to use cure #1 (also known as pink curing salt #1)—it's a combination of sodium nitrite and table salt that's ideal for quick cures. Exact measurements in the cure mix are crucial, according to Cook, so break out the kitchen scale. Don't be shy when applying the seasoning mixture to the pork belly. Cook's advice is simple, "If you're going to eat it, season it." You're creating a brine that equalizes the salinity throughout the meat. While the meat cures, liquid will form in the baking dish. This liquid infuses flavor into the meat, and flipping the meat each day allows the flavor to penetrate both sides equally. After two to three weeks, depending on its size, your pork belly will be ready to cook. If you don't have access to a smoker, you can bake the meat for about three hours in a 275-degree oven. Come breakfast time, slice the meat and start frying. For less mess and evenly crisp bacon, bake strips of pork belly on a wire rack over a rimmed baking sheet.—*Lia Grabowski*

PHOTOS BY JONATHAN BONCEK

Bob Cook's Cured Bacon

3 pounds pork belly
34 grams salt
25 grams sugar
4 grams cure #1
2 grams red pepper flakes

14 grams molasses
Makes about 2 pounds smoked bacon

Be sure to plan ahead: The pork belly will take about three weeks to cure.

1



TRIM THE PORK

Place pork belly on a cutting board and cut off pieces of excess skin and fat. If you prefer to remove the skin entirely, do so at this time. Square off edges.

2



PRESS TO FLATTEN

Using the heel of your hand, press the pork belly to flatten out wrinkled areas and even out the surface of the pork.

3



MIX SPICES

Combine salt, sugar, cure, red pepper flakes, and molasses in a bowl and whisk to combine or pulse in a food processor.

4



SEASON AND REFRIGERATE

Place pork in a non-reactive baking dish and massage cure into meat, covering well on all sides. Keep refrigerated for 2 to 3 weeks, depending on size. Flip meat over once daily.

5



SMOKE

After 2 to 3 weeks, gently rinse off excess cure. Smoke pork belly at 250 degrees for 3 hours, until internal temperature rises to 150 degrees. This can also be done in an oven at 275 degrees.

6



SLICE AND COOK

Slice pork belly into strips 1/16- to 1/8-inch thick, depending on preference. Pan fry or bake at 350 degrees for about 12 minutes, then rotate and bake for 5 minutes more.