

How to Make Meat Jerky

- 1 Slice the meat into strips in the same direction as the muscle. Each strip should be about 1 inch wide and 1/4 inch thick. The length isn't important. Trim off all the fat because the fat won't cure properly and it will spoil the meat.
- 2 Support the meat while drying by hanging it over a clean straight pole. Or push a thin wire through one end of each piece of meat and then hang the string of meat between two trees. The most important thing is that each piece of meat should not touch itself or another strip of meat.
- 3 Dry the raw meat using either one of the following two methods:

First Method: Dry the raw meat in direct sunlight. Protect the meat strips with cheesecloth or screen wire so the birds can't eat them and the flies can't lay eggs on them. This is the method that was used by some Native American Indians. However, this method is not as effective as the next method.

Second Method: The preferred method is to dry the raw meat strips over a fire. Dig a hole in the ground and start a fire in the hole. Don't use soft wood such as pine because the pine pitch will taint the meat. When the fire has burned down to hot coals, hang the meat between two stakes about two feet above the hot coals. The air should feel hot to your hand but it should not burn your hand. You do not want to cook the meat. You only want to dry the meat. Add a few damp hardwood chips (or some decayed wood) to the coals to make smoke. The smoke will put a protective coating on the meat. The heat and the smoke will keep the birds and flies away. The heat will also destroy any harmful microorganisms in the meat.

4. Periodically bend the meat jerky strips to test for dryness. Properly dried meat jerky will crack or snap when bent. If it bends without cracking, it still contains too much moisture. If it crumbles, it is too dry. It will still be edible but it will have lost some of its nutritional value.
5. Store the dried meat jerky in a container to protect it from insects. Properly dried meat jerky is safe to eat for up to one year. It may be eaten dry but it tastes better if dipped in water for a short time just before eating. Or use the meat jerky in a stew.

How Much Time is Required to Dry the Meat?

It is not possible to predict the amount of time required by the smoking process because there are too many different variables that impact the actual time that will be needed.

For example:

The thickness of the meat strips.

The size of the original fire.

The type of wood used to build the original fire.

The distance the meat strips are placed above the coals of the fire.

The amount of heat generated by the red hot coals.

The air temperature about ten feet away from the fire (30 degrees F, 70 degrees F, 105 degrees F, etc.).

The normal humidity in the air about ten feet away from the fire.

Therefore, to determine if the meat is done you must bend each strip of meat. If it cracks or snaps it is done. If it bends easily it is not done.

The meat directly above the very center of the fire will usually dry faster than the meat near the outside edges of the fire. The meat near the outside edges of the fire will usually take a little longer to dry properly.

The thinner meat strips will usually dry a little faster.

The thicker meat strips will usually take a little longer to dry properly.

Therefore, you will probably discover that you will not be removing all the meat strips from above the fire at the same time. Instead you will be selectively removing specific meat strips as they become dry enough while leaving some of the other meat strips above the fire for a slightly longer period of time.