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**Guidelines for precooking meats when making dried beef jerky**

Seattle, WA – August 15, 2012 – If you precook meat to a minimum safe temperature of 160°F before drying to make beef jerky, you will kill any harmful bacteria that may be present. This safety step also shortens the drying time and tenderizes the meat. However, precooked dried meat is not acceptable to everyone, because the product has a different color and texture than the traditional process, which dries raw meat without precooking.

“Some experts stress safety and recommend that all dried meats such as beef jerky be precooked to a safe internal temperature before drying.” says author and chef, Carole Cancler. “How can you decide if you should heed or ignore the recommendation?”

In addition to her experience as a professional in the food industry, Chef Carole has decades of practice in home canning and preserving, which she shares in preserving classes in Seattle, and in her new book, **The Home Preserving Bible**.

Here, Carole offers considerations that can help you decide whether to use a precooking step when making beef jerky and other dried meats:

* **High-risk individuals** susceptible to food poisoning are strongly advised to consume only dried meat that has been prepared using a precooking step. People at risk for food poisoning include persons with weakened immune systems, persons with certain diseases such as cancer and diabetes, pregnant women and their unborn children, and older adults.
* **Aged meats** are preferred by connoisseurs for cooking and eating. However, aged meats naturally contain higher levels of bacteria. Therefore, aged meats are not recommended for jerkies without a precooking step.
* **Ground meat jerkies** inherently contain higher bacterial counts than whole cuts, and therefore justify a precooking step.
* **Wild game meat that is not sound** is not a good choice for making jerky. An animal that has a wounded intestinal tract, or is not well-chilled immediately after slaughter, or receives careless field dressing should be preserved by some other method such as freezing, and used for dishes that are thoroughly cooked, such as stews or soups.
* **Game meats that contain certain parasites**. Meats including bear, boar, cougar, fox, dog, wolf, horse, seal, and walrus may contain different species of Trichinella and tapeworm that are not killed by freezing. These game meats are best suited for thoroughly cooked dishes, such as stews or soups.
* **Drying temperatures below 160°F**, especially if the dried meat is being prepared as a snack food that will be consumed without another safety step, such as the use of high salt, nitrites, or pasteurization.

When precooking meat, it’s best to use a moist heat method to prevent case-hardening. Meat becomes case-hardened when the surface dries prematurely and traps moisture inside, making it difficult to dry the interior meat thoroughly.

Here are the basic steps for precooking meat before drying:

1. **Prepare a cooking liquid**, which can be plain water or a marinade. If using a marinade, complete the marinating step before precooking.
2. **Boil the meat** for 5 minutes in the cooking liquid.
3. **Test several meat strips** for an internal temperature of 160°F. Check the temperature by wrapping a strip around a thermometer.
4. **Drain the strips and place in a dryer immediately,** using your preferred method (such as an oven, dehydrator, or smoker).

**The Home Preserving Bible** by Carole Cancler, New York: Alpha Books, 2012, Paperback, 464 pages, ISBN-13: 978-1615641925 is available nationwide beginning September 4, 21012 from booksellers and canning supply retailers with a suggested retail price of $21. This practical guide details the techniques for ten essential methods for preserving foods. With over 300 recipes, it is one of the most comprehensive books about food preservation among popular canning and preserving books of today. For each preserving method, Chef Carole provides the latest information on procedures, equipment, and safety issues, giving the reader a range of preservation options, whether she likes the do-it-yourself approach or is interested in the latest in modern technology.

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