

SQU!SITO

Artisan Curing & Smoking at Home

10am to 5pm

The Squisito workshop is designed for keen amateurs, butchers, chefs, coeliacs and as a practical introduction to meat curing and meat preservation at home.

All Squisito recipes are gluten free and the workshop includes an introduction to food safety and HACCP for meat handling.

Workshop Plan:

Tasting - breakfast featuring bacon & cured meats

What is curing and how does it work?

Ph - basic bacteriology

Why smoke food?

What equipment do I need?

What ingredients do I need?

What do I need to know about Food Safety & HACCP?

What do I need to know about meat and breeds?

Tea break

Using a safe system for measurement, production, recording & temperature control

Brining & making your own cures

Lunch break

Pancetta, Cured Ham, Smoked Poultry & Game, Salt Beef, Cured & Smoked Pastrami,

Calabrian n'duja, Gravdlax, Smoked Salmon or Cod's Roe & Biltong

Taking it further - Building a smoker and air drying salami

Links

See www.squisito-deli.co.uk for online shopping or email sara@squisito-deli.co.uk

Artisan Curing & Smoking at Home

Curing and smoking is the oldest form of preservation known to man with evidence dating back over 3,500 years. No doubt, early cavemen discovered that meat hanging near the fire lasted longer and that wood smoke imparted an interesting flavour to the meat or fish.

Without preservation mankind would not have survived the cold of Winter or the drought of Summer and crop failures.



By the age of the Vikings, curing and smoking was an [organised trade](#) with whole settlements from Norway to Grimsby dedicated to curing and air drying fish in the open and smoking in [longhouses](#) - a practice that has changed little in 2000 years.



In Britain, [Arbroath Smokies](#) and [Finnan Haddock](#) are prized fish only eclipsed by the bigger [North Atlantic Salmon](#) and [Sockeye Salmon](#) whilst from Norway to Napoli in Europe [stockfish](#) or [stockfisso](#) (salt cod) is king.

The use of *salt* and, to a lesser extent *sugar*, as a means of reducing the *water content* of meat or vegetables is integral to curing whilst the process of *curing* and *fermenting* is a process common to making [salami](#) or [kimchi](#) which dates back to 600BC-1000BC.

Reducing what is known as the [water activity](#) of organic material¹ is the process of curing since harmful or food spoilage bacteria require *water*, *oxygen*, *ph*, *warmth* and *food (or host)* to replicate.

The use of salt, which is [sodium chloride](#) (plus a variety of trace elements in the case of sea salt) takes out *free water* from the cells by [osmosis](#) since bacteria cannot reproduce or move about without water because most are not motile (e.g. no legs).

¹ http://www.edinformatics.com/math_science/science_of_cooking/brining.htm



[Salt](#) can be applied to meat or vegetables either direct or in salt solution which is known as [brine](#)². Typically, you would be looking to use an 80% salt solution in a brine or apply a cure direct and drain away or replace the cure during the process or curing so that the food does not become too salty to eat. The degree of salinity- that is the percentage of salt in water - has a direct relationship with curing time.



Logically, brining by submersion is the most consistent method of curing for larger pieces of meat like hams since the cure evenly covers all the surface of the meat but [dry curing](#) (as opposed to brining) is perfectly acceptable and will give better, or at least different results, in the case of bacon or [gravad lax](#) for example.

At this point, you have to consider what *flavour* you wish to impart to your meat, fruit or vegetables since curing and preserving are all routes to the objective of the artisan - a tasty means of flavouring and extending the safe edible life of a foodstuff. I regard curing and smoking or preserving and fermentation as 'cooking' since it renders the produce safe to eat.

[Sugar](#) is the second main common constituent of a natural cure or [pickle](#) and a natural preservative in it's own right since sugar also reduces free water content by [osmosis](#). The only drawback of sugar is that it is 10-15% as effective a cure as salt so you need to use much more sugar to cure and preserve meat -

² Seawater contains between 3.0 to 3.5% salt in solution so it will yield about 30g to 35g per litre of sea salt when naturally dried. To measure the strength of a brine use a [salometer](#) and refer to a brining table since salinity varies according to temperature.