

Hams come in many different shapes, sizes

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the curing process involving salt and slow smoking over smoldering hickory wood added the final touches that made this ham a favorite of Queen Victoria, who was said to request 10 hams from every voyage from the New World upon its return.

If all these different varieties and cuts haven't confused you, wait till you hear about the pork shoulder. A ham is a whole back leg of a pig, but a picnic ham comes from the shoulder. Add to this the Boston butt, which is really the remainder of the shoulder. The muscles in the shoulder are separated by membranes and fatty tissue, making the meat juicy and flavorful.

The meat has the same uses as ham, but if you prefer your pork lean, you will prefer the meat from the ham. Boston butts are great for making sausage and grinding.

To take the mystery out of what you're buying, here's a simple breakdown of the various kinds of ham readily available at most markets and butchers:

THE WHOLE HAM: The full hind leg of the pig which includes the butt and shank pieces. Available with bone (least expensive), semi-boned (with half the bone removed, and moderate in price) or fully boned (boneless and expensive). Ninety-five percent of all hams come to market ready to eat and are so labeled. The remaining five percent are country hams that have been smoked but require cooking. Check the label to be sure you're getting either a cooked or country ham.

THE HALF HAM: This ham is the split portion of the hind leg. It is available either in shank or butt with the butt being the larger piece or top part of the ham that was closest to the loin. The shank is the part of the pig from the remainder of the leg to the hoof.

WATER-ADDED HAM: This is either a whole or half ham to which a significant amount of water has been injected or added to help keep the ham moist during cooking. A fair comparison here would be the difference between a pre-basted and a

regular turkey. If you are purchasing a fully cooked ham, it is not necessary to again bake it into eternity. A gently warming or slow roasting at a low temperature with continuous basting will suffice. If you are planning a full bake-job, get a water-added ham to ensure juiciness.

BOILED HAM: Boiled ham is just what it says, a fully cooked ham that was smoked and then boiled. Boiling removes a lot of the distinctive flavors that smoking imparts so you will mainly find boiled hams in a canned variety and in the luncheon meat counter where they can pass (barely) for sandwiches.

HAM STEAKS: Ham steaks are about 1/4 inch slices from the butt end of the ham. Available both boned and boneless, they are great for simple pan fries and for fast grilling.

COUNTRY HAM: As stated earlier, country hams are specialty hams that come cured anywhere from 30 days to 6 months with a salt, saltpeter and herb coating, then are slowly smoked for weeks in an old out-back smokehouse. These hams must be soaked and trimmed to remove the heavy salt and "moldy" coating and then can be baked over so slowly and dribbled with everything from bourbon to maple syrup. Be prepared to shell out the bucks, especially for specialty varieties such as Smithfield, Westphalian and Tidewater hams.

Check your local markets for excellent pre-Easter savings on all kinds of hams. An excellent source for country hams is our local farmers' market. If you have a great deli that sells country hams, ask them about ordering you a specialty ham, but secure a price — in writing — when ordering.

Before I end this article, my mom would never forgive me if I didn't inform you of the fact that regardless of cooking procedure, all hams should be cooked to at least 175°F to kill off all the bad stuff. I do agree, however, the trichonosis problem she is referring to has been virtually eliminated with today's excellent processing, and cooking the ham to an internal temperature of about 160°F is enough, but then again, who would dare argue with Mom?

clarification

Gundella's recipe for Apple Cake, in her Kitchen Witch column for March on Irish recipes, should have

included this ingredient: 1/4 cup butter (or other solid shortening). The recipe ran Monday, March 14.

Chef Larry's homemade spices

Here are a few of my favorite recipes for homemade spices. Bon Appetit!

MILD CURRY POWDER
1 tbs. whole black peppercorns
1 tbs. whole cumin seed
1 1/2-inch stick cinnamon
1/4 tbs. coriander seed
4 whole cloves
1 tsp. cardamom seeds (from pod)
2 tsp. turmeric
1/4 tsp. dried chili pepper pods

Pulverize all ingredients in a blender, electric grinder or mortar and pestle. If necessary, put through a sieve to achieve a fine powder.

HOT CURRY POWDER
1 1/4 tsp. whole cumin seed
1 tsp. coriander seed
1 tsp. whole black peppercorns
1 tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. dried chili peppers
8 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper

Blend in a blender or spice grinder or mortar and pestle. To achieve a fine powder, put through a sieve.

HOMEMADE PUMPKIN PIE SPICE BLEND
8 tsp. ground cinnamon
2 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cloves

Mix well and store until needed. Use in pumpkin pie, squash dishes, sweet potato pie, gingerbread and spice cookies.

SPAGHETTI SAUCE SPICE
1 bay leaf
2 cloves garlic
2 tsp. oregano
2 tsp. basil
1 tsp. thyme
1 tsp. marjoram
1 tsp. rosemary
1/4 tsp. tarragon
1/4 cup dried parsley
1 tsp. fresh ground black pepper

Combine all ingredients except bay leaf and garlic. Add bay leaf and

garlic when making individual recipes. Keep this made up in a jar and add 2 tablespoons to every 2 pounds of fresh tomatoes or 32 ounces sauce.

VANILLA SUGAR
(use this in your dessert)
4 cups sugar (granulated or powdered)
1 vanilla bean

Place sugar in a covered container. With scissors or a sharp knife, split the vanilla bean lengthwise, exposing the seeds. Place in with sugar, cover and allow to sit a few days. Will keep indefinitely, just keep adding more sugar as needed.

Fish fillets replace chicken in recipe

AP — A takeoff on chicken cordon bleu, this recipe features fish fillets with the traditional ham and cheese filling. For extra-speedy preparation, we stacked the fillets instead of rolling them. Bread crumbs go on the top only, so the crumbs stay crisp and crunchy during microwaving.

MICROWAVE BLUE-RIBBON STACKED FILLETS
Eight 3-1/4-ounce fresh or frozen, thawed skinless flounder or sole fillets

1/4 lb. Swiss cheese, quartered
1 green onion, thinly sliced
1 egg
1 tablespoon water
1/4 cup fine dry seasoned bread crumbs
1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
1 tablespoon melted parsley

Place four of the fish fillets on a non-metal rack in a 12-by-7 1/4-by-2-

inch microwave-safe dish. Top each with a piece of ham, cutting ham to fit. Place two pieces of cheese on top of ham; sprinkle with green onion.

In a shallow dish combine egg and water. In another shallow dish combine bread crumbs, Parmesan and parsley. Dip one side of remaining fillets into egg mixture, then into crumb mixture. Place fillets, crumb side up, on top of fillets in dish. Sprinkle with any remaining crumb mixture.

Cook, uncovered, on 100 percent power (high) for four minutes. Rotate dish a half-turn and cook uncovered on high for two to four minutes more or until fish is done. Makes four servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 265 cal., 38 g pro., 5 g carbo., 9 g fat, 175 mg chol., 473 mg sodium. U.S. RDA: 14 percent thiamine, 12 percent riboflavin, 17 percent niacin, 19 percent calcium, 11 percent iron, 48 percent phosphorus.

Meatball appetizers keep well in freezer

AP — Slow a party's worth of make-ahead appetizers in your freezer. These meatballs can be prepared up to a month ahead and frozen until you want to serve them. Then add the sauce and vegetables and they'll be ready for the party in less than a half hour.

STOW-AWAY APPETIZER MEATBALLS
1 beaten egg
1/4 cup milk
1/4 cup corn bread stuffing mix
1/4 cup finely chopped celery
1 teaspoon dry mustard

Dash pepper
4 pound ground fully cooked ham
1 pound ground pork
1 cup maple-flavored syrup
1/4 cup vinegar
2 teaspoons dry mustard
2 cups blue-sliced carrots or bite-size cauliflower florets
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 tablespoons water
1 green pepper, cut into bite-size pieces

In a mixing bowl combine egg and milk. Stir in stuffing mix, celery, 1 teaspoon dry mustard and pepper. Let stand 3 minutes. Add ham and

pork; mix well. Shape into 1-inch meatballs; place in shallow baking pan. Bake in 350-degree oven 15 to 18 minutes or until done. Drain on paper towels. Cool. Place on baking sheet and freeze. When frozen, place in moisture- and vapor-proof container or bag. Seal, label and freeze.

In a saucepan combine maple-flavored syrup, vinegar and remaining dry mustard. Bring to boiling. Stir in meatballs; cover and simmer 8 to 10 minutes or until meatballs are heated through. Meanwhile, cook carrots or cauliflower, covered, in a small

amount of boiling water 10 to 15 minutes or until just tender. Drain well. Combine cornstarch and water. Add carrots or cauliflower, cornstarch mixture and green pepper to meatballs. Cook and stir until bubbly. Cook 2 minutes more. Keep warm in chafing dish. Serve with wooden toothpicks. Makes about 25 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 94 cal., 5 g pro., 12 g carbo., 2 g fat, 25 mg chol., 217 mg sodium. U.S. RDA: 56 percent vit. A, 18 percent vit. C, 14 percent thiamine.

BOURBON GLAZED HAM
1 soaked ham, pre-cooked
1/4 cup bourbon whiskey (optional)
2 cups dark brown sugar
1 tablespoon dry mustard
1/4 cup whole cloves
Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place the ham fat side up on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. Bake in the center of oven for 2 hours. If needed, cut away the rind and score the fat by cutting deeply through the fat until you reach the meat. Return the ham to the rack and raise the oven heat to 450 degrees. With a pas-

try brush, paint the ham all over with 1/4 cup of bourbon. Then combine the remainder of the bourbon with the sugar and mustard. Pat the mixture firmly over the scored fat. Stud the fat with the cloves and baste lightly with the pan drippings for 20 minutes or until the sugar has melted and formed a brilliant glaze.

RED EYE GRAVY
(great with ham and biscuits for breakfast)
1/4 cup drippings from a baked ham
1 tablespoon strong coffee
water

In a cast-iron skillet, add the ham drippings and cook on medium high heat for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add one tablespoon of strong black coffee for color, continue stirring and then add just enough water to thin slightly. Continue cooking till thick, then pour over ham and biscuits.

HAM TURNOVERS
1 pound ricotta cheese
1/4 cup diced mozzarella cheese
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1 egg
1/4 cup ham, diced
1 teaspoon salt (optional)

1/2 teaspoon pepper
1/2 teaspoon mixed Italian herbs
1 10-oz. package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
1 package refrigerated dough mix
Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Combine the cheese, egg, ham, salt, pepper, herbs and spinach in a bowl and mix well. Pat out the refrigerated dough mixture into a 12-inch circle. Spoon cheese and ham mixture into half the dough, leaving a 2-inch margin. Fold dough over to form a large turnover and pinch edges together firmly. Bake for 30 minutes until crust is evenly browned.

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