

Sausage from page D1

Before stuffing the casings, I cook and taste a small batch of the filling. I added a bit more garlic to the kielbasa mix and another sprinkle of marjoram. Why go through the trouble of making sausage if it doesn't taste right?

After rinsing salt from the hog casings in cold water, I wrapped one on the end of the sausage stuffing tube or the horn. Activating the machine begins the actual creative process of stuffing the sausage. (OK, this activity may look a little gross to the novice, but that aroma of spices and garlic dance tense your senses and soon it's all forgotten.)

Keeping the meat coarse is another key to good sausage making. This helps retain the strength and texture. If the meat is ground too fine and over-processed, the sausage will dry out when cooked. I run the meat through only once to make it coarse, add the spices, then mix it thoroughly with my hands.

When I finish making about 5 pounds of each, I roll the kielbasa and Italian sausage links to separate them well. I "air dry" the kielbasa at about 40°F, and set the Italian sausage in the garage in sub-freezing temperatures until the links set.

The next day, I froze the links in double bags. I could still smell the garlic in the freezer. (My wife politely reminded me of that, too.)

An army of brats
Just a few days earlier, meat

cutters Mike Smith and Kevin Peterson worked on a larger output of their own sausage at Holiday Market in Canton.

They pull pork butts out of a refrigerator, then chop off gristle or other connective tissue from the meat. Smith chops the meat into chunks.

Today is the Wednesday before the Super Bowl. Today's batch is about 25 pounds of beer brats, at least 30 feet long, on display along with kielbasa, bratwurst, andouille, chicken and turkey varieties, and even a jalapeno variety.

"What is critical to making sausage is using fresh ingredients, and use a lean meat," Smith said. The meat is nearly ready for a "daily grind."

He uses a meat/fat mix of 85/15 percent. Smith said that mix "gives it a nice flavor and texture" when cooked.

You can see the difference — this sausage has far less of the white, marbled look of fat than popular commercial brands that would make a cardiologist imagining fat arterial blockages cringe. Holiday's sausage looks far leaner.

Smith runs the pork butt pieces through a grinder twice, but cuts it coarsely for the sausage.

Once it is ground, seasonings are added, a mix of salt, pepper, garlic, malt, barley malt and commercial spice. Smith adds water to the seasoning blend.

"We use a custom-blended seasoning, which is blended in big

batches, so you don't have to adjust it," Smith said.

Hog casings have been soaked overnight in water, to remove the salt in which they are stored. The machine, a stuffer powered with a motor, feeds the sausage meat mix, through a tube and into a casing.

Peterson scoops the sausage into the stuffer, then Smith rolls the long meat filled casing, to create each individual sausage.

It's a relatively quick process. The brats keep 14 days refrigerated, 6 months frozen.

"Refrigeration helps set 'em up," said Smith. "Once they set, they'll be all right."

Smith's advice for the beer brat is serve them with, of course, beer. "Cook 'em in beer, and serve 'em up with a little ketchup and mustard. Grill 'em."

While scores of folks dined on brats for the Super Bowl, a few miles away another home enjoyed homemade kielbasa and Italian sausage.

Once we tasted each kind, I wish I could eat the remaining 4 pounds of this mild version of kielbasa to eat it through the fourth quarter of the game. Of course, the Italian version also tasted like a World Champion on its own, with its sweetness and spiciness.

Once again, I limited my intake, but it wasn't that painful self-denial over the fat content. I stopped for another reason: I was full.

See related recipes on D2.

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Book from page D1

niques in the first chapter so that even a novice will feel at home.

Aidella states some of the obvious (use fresh spices, meat and ingredients), reminds readers about food safety with pork (wash hands frequently with plenty of soap and hot water during sausage making) and relates the not-so-obvious (make sausage during the cooler times of the day or below 70°F, but it's not like you worry about that in February.)

While the book focuses on the basics for making fresh sausage, it also explains curing and smoking if you prefer sausage with a stronger texture and taste. For

example, the smoked kielbasa recipe calls for Hungarian paprika, coriander, nutmeg and curing salts. Air dry it overnight, then smoke it and you've got smoked kielbasa.

This book isn't just European or American in focus. There's Thai Turkey and Chicken Sausage, flavored with cilantro, basil and mint; or Chinese Pork and Shrimp Sausage.

The hunters will have a field day with venison sausage, buffalo sausage and duck sausage. How can we forget spicy country sausage? That's here, too, and Minnesota Potato Sausage and Chicago-style hot dogs.

Other recipes include sausage in main courses, such as the Pasta with Italian Sweet Fennel Sausage and Porcini, mixed with dry red wine, garlic, tomatoes and basil or Chicken and Andouille Gumbo.

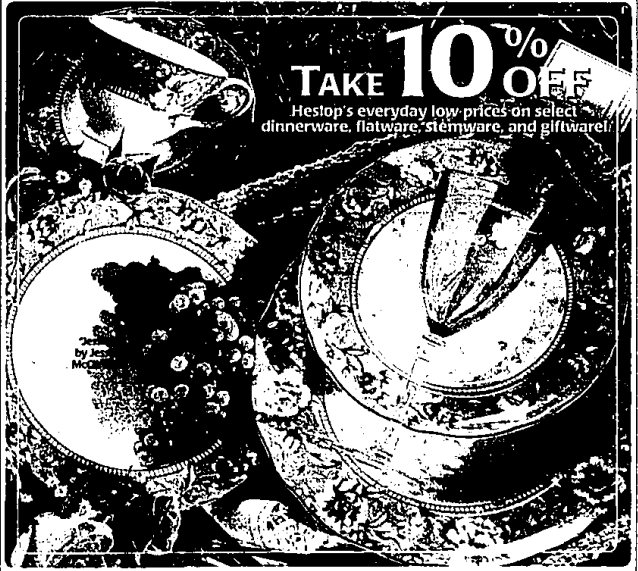
If you prefer to use commercial brands or the homemade versions, the second half of the book features recipes in which you can use both.

The book contains a vast array of flavors and tastes, a melting pot of ethnicity and Americana. Readers can follow the trails of sausage making through these easy recipes to prepare their own healthier homemade versions.

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