

# Ham for Easter - consider the tasty choices

BY TOMMY C. SIMMONS  
FOR A WEEKLY FEATURES

**BATON ROUGE, La.** - Any way you slice it, cured ham with its smoky, sweet flavor is a favorite Easter menu meat choice. Now is the time to start shopping for a ham and thinking about how you want to season and garnish it.

Banish any idea that ham is a complicated meat to cook. It's easy.

In fact, if you get in a rush on Easter morning and don't do anything more than stick a cured, smoked or "city" ham in a 325 F oven for 1 1/2 hours, you'll still get a moist and tasty meat to slice and serve.

Ham can be glazed, sauced or frosted to fit your family's taste preferences and your desire to prepare a dazzling entree for the Easter table.

If this is the first time you've bought ham, other than sliced ham at the deli, you are likely to be baffled at the choices you'll find in the supermarket meat case.

Not only will you find hams labeled "ham with natural juices," and "ham with water added," you might also see an economically priced ham called a "ham and water product."

There were hams at a local supermarket recently ranging in price from \$1.59 per pound to \$3.98 per pound, and a similar price range will probably be available in many markets.

Which ham should you buy?

Generally, the "ham and water product" is recommended as a slicing ham for sandwiches. The ham is injected with a high percentage of water and brine solution during the curing process, which means that the meat will dry as the water cooks out during baking.

This isn't a problem if you keep the ham baked or glazed during the baking so that the meat retains some moisture and doesn't get too tough.

I baked a "ham and water product" that was labeled as having 23 percent of its weight in added water and brining ingredients. It turned out moist, flavorful and just fine for slicing and serving with vegetables. The key was keeping it baked during the cooking so it didn't dry out.

You'll also need to decide if you want a boneless or bone-in ham. While the boneless ham is easier to slice, the bone-in ham has more flavor.

In fact, almost all the "gourmet" hams, the popular spiral-cut and honey-crusted hams sold at specialty shops, are bone-in hams. Nutrients in the bone flavor the meat as it cooks.

Hams usually come either partially cooked or fully cooked. Even the fully cooked ham's taste and texture improves with additional cooking at home - the additional baking firms the meat.

Some hams are closely trimmed, meaning almost all the fat has

been removed from the outside surface of the ham. The closely trimmed ham can be basted with juices or seasonings or glazed 30 minutes before the end of cooking time, but it shouldn't be scored before baking.

Scoring is when you cut diamond-pattern shallow slices through the layer of fat, 3/4-inch to 1-inch wide, all over the ham's surface. Scoring enables the fat to melt off the surface of the ham as it bakes and opens up surface areas for the flavors and spices from a glaze to penetrate the meat.

If you scored a closely trimmed ham, the juices of the ham would flow out too quickly as the ham cooks, and the meat would dry out.

Hams come from the rear leg of the pork carcass, though a small ham, called a picnic ham, is taken from the lower portion of the front leg.

Picnic hams are usually boiled to tenderize them. The picnic ham has plenty of flavor and is inexpensive, but it doesn't make a pretty Easter ham.

Since whole hams are quite large, much too large for most families, you'll often want to buy a half or portioned ham. These cuts will be labeled rump or butt half; shank half; rump or butt portion, and shank portion. The half size is larger than the portion size.

Hams should be refrigerated before cooking and after cooking.

And, though most cooks claim that freezing a ham affects the texture of the meat, I haven't found that the texture change is that noticeable or objectionable.

Trust me: If you have a small family, freeze leftover ham after the second day you'll be sick of it by the third and end up throwing away perfectly good pieces simply because you are tired of the taste. Frozen ham will maintain quality for up to two months.

There are dozens of recipes for baking hams. Following are two favorites:

## PEACH-GLAZED SMOKED HAM

1 half, fully cooked, smoked bone-in ham (7 pounds)  
1/2 cup peach jam  
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard  
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger  
Rosemary sprigs for garnish

Preheat oven to 325 F. Remove skin and trim all but 1/4 inch of the fat from ham. Score fat, just through to the meat, into 3/4- to 1-inch diamonds. Place ham on rack in medium roasting pan.

Insert meat thermometer into center of ham, being careful that pointed end does not touch bone. Bake 1 1/2 hours.

Meanwhile, prepare glaze: In cup, mix jam, mustard and ginger until blended.

Brush glaze over ham. Bake ham 30 minutes longer, or until ther-

mometer reaches 140 F. Place on warm, large platter. Let stand 15 minutes; keep warm.

Slice and serve with vegetables of choice (brussels sprouts and sweet potatoes go well).

**Serves 12.**  
Cook's note: You may bake the ham ahead of time, store up to 2 days in the refrigerator, then reheat for 1 hour in a 325 F oven.

## MONTE'S HAM

One 15-pound smoked (partially cooked), bone-in ham  
1 1/2 cups orange marmalade  
1 cup Dijon mustard  
1 1/2 cups firmly packed brown sugar  
1 tablespoon whole cloves

Trim tough outer skin and excess fat from the ham. Place ham, meat side down, in a large roasting pan and score, making crosshatch incisions with a sharp knife. Insert meat thermometer into center of ham, being careful not to hit the bone.

Roast at 300 F for 2 hours. Remove ham from oven and increase heat to 350 F.

For glaze, combine orange marmalade, Dijon mustard and brown sugar in a medium bowl.

Stud ham with cloves, sticking 1 clove at the intersection of each

crosshatch, then brush with glaze, and return to oven.

Cook ham about another 1 1/2 hours, or until thermometer reaches 160 F, brushing with glaze at least 3 times.

Transfer to a cutting board or platter and allow to rest for about 30 minutes. Carve and serve warm or at room temperature.

**Serves about 30.**  
(Recipe from *It's Always Christmas*, a Food Focus booklet, October 1998).

## Tips for baked ham

Read package label instructions to check whether ham is partially or fully cooked. This information determines cooking time. A partially cooked ham must be baked to reach an internal temperature of 160 F. A fully cooked ham can be baked to an internal temperature of 140 to 150 F.

If ham has a covering of a layer of fat, score it before baking. If the ham does not have a fat covering, do not score it. Baste it as it cooks and score it during the final 30 minutes of baking.

Bake hams uncovered on a rack in a foil-lined pan in the oven at 325 F unless recipe indicates otherwise.

As the ham bakes, turn it over in the pan at least once so that the brine in the meat doesn't sink to the bottom and make the bottom quarter of the ham too salty tasting.

## Easter meal is talk topic at seminary

Why do many churches bless Easter baskets?

That's one of the questions that will be answered during a seminar on "The Easter Meal in the Polish American Home" at 7 p.m. Monday, March 26, in the Dombrowski Fieldhouse at SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary, 3635 Indian Trail, Orchard Lake. Admission is free. For more information: (248) 683-0310.

Father Czeslaw Krysa, the seminary's director of liturgy, will also probe other aspects of the holiday custom such as social

justice and the Easter basket, ancient creation myths, what's really in an Easter egg, and the Polish roots of swieconka ("blessed Easter meal").

The liturgy as celebrated in the Polish American home is Krysa's area of specialization. The Easter Sunday meal was the topic of his doctoral dissertation that he defended last summer at St. Anselm Pontifical Liturgical Institute in Rome, Italy. Krysa has also authored a book, *A Polish Christmas Eve*, dealing with that season's Polish holiday customs and traditions.

## Bunnies from page B1

ends up looking like a large chocolate Easter egg.

Another favorite Easter dessert, she says, especially for family celebrations, is a platter of cupcakes decorated with bunnies, chicks, bird nests and other such spring symbols.

"Some customers like to adhere to the religious meaning behind Easter. For them we have decorated cakes in the shape of a cross."

While the shop plans to have many of these homemade delights freshly baked and in stock for Easter, Denning suggests that customers place a special order to assure that

they get exactly what they want.

The bakery, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year, goes beyond providing great desserts. It is offering its first-ever parent-child baking class on April 6. For more information on the class and/or to place a cake order, call (734) 251-3680.

The Cake Shoppe is located at 8036 North Wayne Road, Westland. Hours are 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays and Tuesdays; 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesdays through Fridays; 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays; and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays.



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