

SURVIVAL MEAT PRESERVING - PART 1, PEMMICAN

Preserving meat requires energy to be expended. Very simple concept. It is the method of using that energy that is of interest to us. The use of electrical energy via freezing is the most common form of meat preservation today -- and the most fragile, as we can expect the electrical grid to go down at some point in the near future. So, what else can we do to preserve meat?

All other methods of preserving meat also require the use of energy -- principally yours! Some methods are easier than others, but make up for that by using another energy source than electricity. Canning meats requires jars and lids and a heat source. Those are medium-technology items, however, and may not be available deep into a crisis.

The most primitive method of meat preservation -- and the most dependable -- requires a lot of human energy. These would be smoking, making jerky, and making pemmican.

PEMMICAN

Pemmican is the classic survival ration. It is really a paste of powdered jerky mixed with dried berries, nuts, and meted suet rolled up into balls. To make pemmican you must first make jerky and locate a source of fat for the suet. Beef or pork fat can be used, as other animals often do not have enough fat to use with their meat. Other fats, such as from vegetable sources, generally do not harden and are not recommended for use in pemmican.

The jerky for pemmican is made in the usual manner (that part will follow someday), but in thinner strips. The meat source used should be the best cuts available, stripped to be about one inch by 1/4 inch, and as long as possible. When properly prepared for pemmican, the jerky strips should be **very hard and brittle**, more brittle than needed for regular jerky. The strips are then pounded (clean rocks, a cleaned anvil and single jack, whatever) to powder the meat fibers, leaving the tendons, nerve fibers, etc, to feed to your animals.

The fat (or suet) used for pemmican is rendered (melted slowly without overheating) in a large kettle. The kettle is then taken from heat and allowed to cool. Then the fat is examined, and only the hardest, purest fat is put aside for use in the pemmican. The very soft fat can be fed to animals that are working, and/or used with wood ashes (preferably hardwood) to make soap.

Everything is then ready to make pemmican. You will need to make fist sized balls composed of 50% powdered meat (with a touch of salt added, if available, to stop salt craving), and 50% suet with a small amount of dry, powdered berries and/or nuts. The components are then thoroughly mixed (the suet can be softened with heat) and formed into fist-sized balls.

The pemmican balls must then be preserved and protected against moisture. This can be accomplished in a number of ways.

1. Wrapping the pemmican in waxed paper and dipping in wax. This is the easiest way, but may not be possible under primitive conditions.

2. Wrapping in cheesecloth, and dipping in suet. This is the "classical" method used by early expeditions to the west, the old U.S. Calvary, and mountain men.
3. Just dipping the balls of pemmican in melted suet. This is the least desirable method, but works.
4. Stuffing the pemmican into cleaned, washed intestinal material from the meat source animal, then dip in suet. This method works well, but is more time consuming than the others.

USING PEMMICAN

Pemmican prepared properly will last for many years and is a highly nutritious food source. It can be used in stews with tubers and corn meal added, cooked by itself, or eaten raw. If a mold forms on the pemmican ball, it is merely washed or scraped off, and the rest of the pemmican used. By itself, pemmican will keep people fit on long hikes or in other strenuous activity (because of the high fat content), and if used in conjunction with corn meal provides almost all of the nutritional needs required for continuous living and working. Only fresh greens need to be added to make a complete, well rounded meal!

SURVIVAL MEAT PRESERVING - PART 2, JERKY

MAKING JERKY

Modern store bought jerky is not real jerky. It is too thin, too small, too soft, and is often preserved with chemicals. Real homemade jerky is thicker, longer, and very stout! It is tough! To eat real jerky, you "worry" off a chunk with your teeth -- if you can -- or cut off a "flake" with a pocket knife, then soak the "flake" in your cheek for awhile until it finally softens. If jerky isn't that tough, it won't keep!

Meat for jerky is prepared from lean, trimmed strips about 1 1/2" by 1/2", and as long as practical. Normally the larger muscles are cut into jerky, and are cut with the grain rather than across it as for steaks. All tendons, gristle, fat, etc, that can be removed should be trimmed off. The meat strips are then lightly powdered with coarse, freshly ground pepper (if available) to keep away flies, and lightly salted to help with taste and salt craving. Once prepared, the pepper can be brushed off the iron like chucks easily, if desired.

The meat strips should be dried in the sun about four (4) feet above a slow fire. Non resinous hardwoods should be used for the fire, and the flames kept very low. The smoke from the fire is to keep away birds and flies, NOT used for drying the meat! Use a low fire, with little flame or heat. Green hardwood works fine, but resinous softwoods such as Douglas fir will impart a bad taste to the jerky. Fruit woods (except wild cherry) impart a nice, mild taste to the jerky.

The drying rack can be made from forked sticks pounded into the ground, and the cross sticks that hold the meat made from thin, green wood such as willow or vine maple. A sharpened end on the cross stick should be pushed through one end of the meat strips, which will allow them to hang down. Allow at least an inch of separation between meat strips. The cross sticks

may be carried indoors if rain threatens, and at night to protect from dew. Do not dry in the sun before 9:00 in the morning, or after 6:00 at night to avoid getting dew on the meat. Just the dew from a single morning may saturate the meat sufficiently to require an additional day of drying time!

USING JERKY

Jerky can be used as is, always having a little flake in the pouch, or cooked in stews. If cooked, it is best to soak the jerky overnight prior to use, then slice across the grain into chunks before cooking. If possible, fat should be added to the stew, as well as tubers and corn meal. If any mold on the meat is detected, it can be washed off before use with vinegar.

Really hard jerky will keep for a long time, but should be stored in a dry place. If you live in an area of high humidity or frequent rains, the jerky can be stored by using the same techniques listed previously for pemmican.

DRYING METHODS CONCLUSION

As you can see, preparing dried meat products requires the expenditure of lots of energy -- yours! Cutting and stripping the meat, cutting the hardwood and hauling it to the racks, keeping the fire going, bringing in the racks at night, etc, does require time, but it is certainly not hard work. If you have the meat available to make large batches, your effort per piece is reduced considerably.

In a real survival situation, without electricity for refrigeration or freezing, a large supply of meat can best be preserved by drying or smoking. The alternative is to do without, and that is a poor alternative indeed.