

Cutting the Pork Carcass¹

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The highest-grade pork is produced from young, well-fed hogs that weigh from 180 to 250 pounds. The fat should be firm and from 1 to 1½ inches thick over the center of the back. The hams should be full and plump, the sides straight and smooth.

Pork carcasses of highest quality and those most suitable for the home meat supply are produced from hogs that are from five to eight months of age at time of slaughter. Hogs that are fed liberally on feeds that permit rapid growth and fattening from weaning time to these ages will produce pork of proper size and finish.

Chilling

To prevent spoilage and to insure more efficient processing, hang the pork carcass in refrigerator storage for 12 to 24 hours. This period of time is adequate to properly chill the carcass (38F to the bone) if the cooler temperature is held between 34-38F.

Cutting

Place the side of pork on the table with the inside of the carcass facing up.

Pull out the leaf (kidney) fat and kidney. If the ham is to be artery pumped, leave the artery intact at its upper attachment.

Cut off the head at the atlas joint or first joint. Cut the jowls or cheeks off close to the jawbone and trim the remaining meat from the head.

Saw off the shoulder across the third rib, counting from the neck. Remove the neckbones or spareribs. Avoid cutting into the shoulder.

The shoulder can be kept whole, cured and smoked, or it can be divided into Boston butt and picnic and used fresh or cured. If the shoulder is to be cured, it should be smooth and properly trimmed.

To divide the shoulder into picnic ham and Boston butt, cut the shoulder approximately in half by cutting about one inch below the shoulder blade and parallel with the breast. Trim the excess fat and neck meat from the picnic. Cut the excess fat off the shoulder butt or Boston butt. Square the picnic by sawing off the foreleg parallel to the cut made in dividing the shoulder.

Separate the ham from the middle (side) by sawing across the backbone and through the pelvic bone. Make this cut just behind the rise in the backbone, about 2½ inches (the width of three fingers) in front of the aitch bone, or pelvic bone, and at right angles to the length of the leg.

Trim the ham and remove the backbone, tail, and flank. The ham should be trimmed so that there will be a uniform layer of fat covering the ham from the butt end to the shank. Saw off the hind leg at the hock joint. Remove the

1. This document is CIR445, one of a series of the Animal Science Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date October 1997. Revised June 2003. Reviewed by R. Myer, October 2011. Visit the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

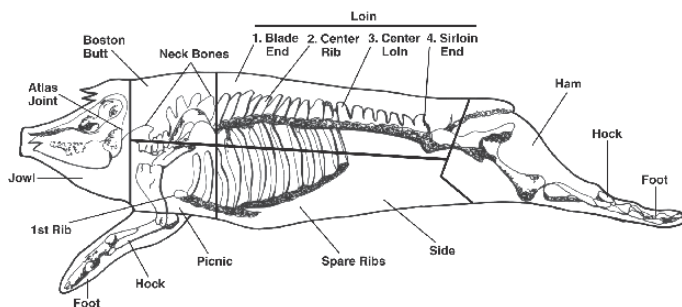
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hock by cutting one inch below the thick part of the ham. The hock can be left on the ham and cured with the ham.

Separate the loin from the side by making a straight cut from a point close to the lower edge of the backbone at the shoulder end to a point just below the tenderloin muscle from which the ham was cut. Separate the fat back from the loin. Leave an even covering of fat, about ¼ inch thick on the loin.

Trim the regular spareribs from the side or belly. Turn the blade of the knife towards the ribs so that it will not cut into the meat. Square the side by cutting a strip parallel to the loin and wide enough to remove the nipples. The flank end may also have to be squared.

Uses



Shoulder - cured whole (a) Picnic - cured or fresh roast (b) Boston butt - cured or fresh roasts and pork steaks.

Ham - cured whole - roasts and ham steaks. Fresh - roasts and fresh ham steaks.

Belly or Side - cured and smoked - bacon. Fresh - fresh pork slices. Cured - dry salt bacon and smoked bacon.

Loin - cured and smoked - roasts and chops. Fresh - loin roast and chops.

Jowls - cured and smoked - jowl bacon. Fresh - sausage.

Lean and Fat Trimmings - sausage.

Spareribs - fresh, smoked or barbecued spareribs.

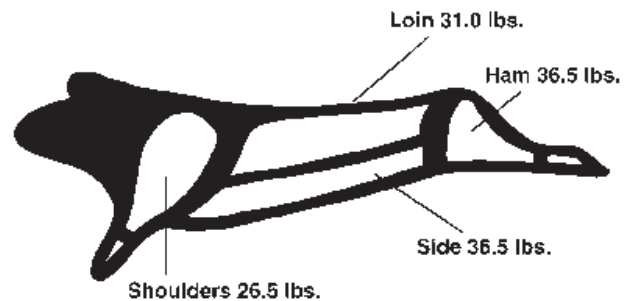
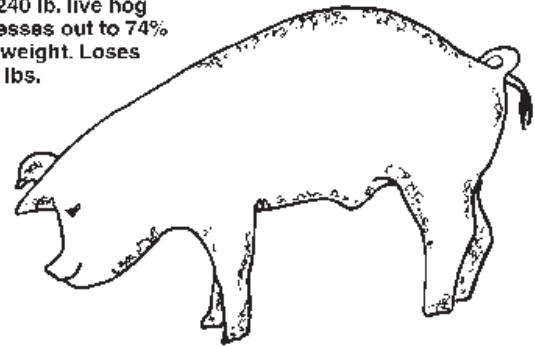
Neckbones - fresh.

Pork Carcass Yields

An additional 30 lbs of fat for lard, bones and waste further reduces this 150 lb carcass to only 120 lbs of salable retail

cuts -- chops, hams, bacon, ribs and sausage -- that the retailer packages and puts on display in the meat case.

A 240 lb. live hog dresses out to 74% of weight. Loses 62 lbs.



Curing

Pork is cured in three ways -- with salt alone, with salt and sugar, or with salt, sugar, and saltpeter. The last is the preferred "sugar cure." You can sugar-cure pork either dry or in sweet-pickle brine. Because the dry cure is faster, it is popular in the South, where warm weather makes spoilage a serious problem. With either the dry or sweet-pickle cure, remember the main essentials:

- Chill the meat and keep it cold.
- Use the amount of salt in the recipe.
- Give the meat enough curing time to absorb the salt thoroughly.
- Smoke cured meat long enough to drive out excess moisture.

Weigh meat and curing ingredients carefully. Too little salt may cause spoilage; too much salt makes hard, dry, over-salty meat.

Keep meat cold while in cure. Hold curing meat at a temperature near 36-40F. Higher temperatures increase the chance of spoilage. Lower temperatures slow salt penetration.

If curing temperatures drop below freezing for several days, add the same number of days to curing time. Temperatures below 36F slow salt penetration.

Frozen meat is difficult to handle. If fresh meat freezes, thaw it in a chill room or in cold brine before putting it in cure.

Figure curing time carefully. Too few days in cure may cause spoilage. Too long a cure in heavy salt results in loss of quality.

Other Resources

“A Hog’s Not All Chops,” Pork Industry Group, National Livestock and Meat Board.

“Slaughtering, Cutting, and Processing Pork,” USDA Farmers’ Bulletin no. 2138.

“Meat for the Family,” Cornell Extension Bulletin 732, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.