



# Handling, Using and Storing Pork

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*Michigan-raised pork products are available year-round.*

## Recommendations:

When purchasing pork, choose firm and grayish-pink cuts. Look for cuts that have small flecks of fat within the muscle, which is known as “marbling.” Some marbling is desirable because it provides flavor and tenderness. All pork sold in retail stores must have a seal from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that shows it was “Passed and Inspected by USDA.” This seal certifies the meat was inspected and is wholesome and free from disease (USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, 2013, March).

## Storage & Food Safety:

- To prevent cross-contamination, in the grocery cart or in your refrigerator, always place packaged pork in plastic bags to avoid juices from leaking or dripping on to other food items.
- Place raw pork in a cooler on ice if the estimated trip from the market to your refrigerator lasts more than one hour; this is especially important in warm weather.
- Raw pork should be stored in a bowl or on a platter in the bottom of the refrigerator. Your refrigerator temperature should be at 40 °F or less.
- Always wash cutting boards, utensils and surfaces that have touched raw meat with hot, soapy water and then sanitize with 1 teaspoon of regular bleach in 1 quart of warm water.
- Use or freeze products with a “sell by” date within three to five days of purchase.
- Whole cuts of pork may be refrigerated for up to five days after purchase.
- Ground pork may be refrigerated for one to two days after purchase.
- Cooked pork should be consumed within three to four days after cooking or frozen for up to three months.
- Washing meat before cooking it is not recommended. This can cause cross-contamination in which bacteria in raw meat can spread to other foods, utensils and surfaces.



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## Thawing:

*Always* thaw meats in the refrigerator, in the microwave or in cold water. Never thaw meat on the counter. It is best to plan ahead for slow, safe thawing in the refrigerator. Small pieces of meat should defrost within one to two days. Large items will take longer, approximately one day for every 5 pounds of weight. Use thawed pork within four days. When defrosting meat in the microwave, cook it immediately after thawing because some areas may become warm and begin to cook during microwaving. For fast thawing, place meat in a leakproof plastic bag and immerse it in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes to be sure it stays cold. After thawing, cook the meat immediately. Although one can cook pork while it is still frozen, it will take approximately one and a half times as long to cook.

## Marinating:

*Always* marinate meat in the refrigerator. If you intend to use some of the marinade as a sauce on the cooked food, set some aside in the refrigerator before adding to the raw meat. Do not reuse marinade from raw meat unless you boil it for several minutes to destroy any bacteria from the raw meat. Discard marinade after cooking the meat and do not save it for future use.

## Cooking:

Research indicates that color and texture are not safe ways of determining the doneness of pork products. Use a food thermometer to make sure the pork has reached the correct temperature. The USDA recommends chops, steaks and roasts be cooked to a minimum 145 °F and then rested 3 minutes after cooking. Resting the meat means letting it sit for a given time before eating it. You may reheat smoked, fully cooked hams to 140 °F. Ground pork must reach an internal temperature of 160 °F (USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, 2012, June).

Dry-heat cookery methods including grilling, broiling, roasting, pan broiling and pan frying are ideal for more tender cuts of meat. Moist-heat cookery includes adding moisture and using methods such as braising or cooking with liquid such as in stews and soups.

Moist-heat cookery is ideal for less tender cuts of meat that require long and slow cooking. Different cuts have different preferred methods of cooking (Table 1).

Pork cut names have been updated and simplified to relate to beef cuts that are familiar to consumers (Table 1).

## Freezing:

Freezing keeps food safe almost indefinitely. The following recommended USDA storage times are for quality of frozen pork. The freezer storage time for uncooked whole pieces of pork, such as roasts, steaks and chops, is four to 12 months. Freezer storage time for uncooked ground pork is three to four months.

To prepare pork for the freezer, wrap with aluminum foil, freezer paper or freezer bags. Seal the packaging well to keep air out and moisture in. Vacuum packaging with home vacuum packagers is also a good choice for packaging. Portioning the pork makes for easy meal planning. Always label and date the packaging.

## Canning:

You can use a pressure canner to preserve meats. Please read the National Center for Home Food Preservation's *Preserving Food: Using Pressure Canners* before beginning. If this is your first time canning, also read the USDA's *Principles of Home Canning*.

### **Procedure:**

Choose quality chilled meat. Remove excess fat and large bones.

**Hot pack** – Precook meat until rare by roasting, stewing or browning in a small amount of fat. Add 1 teaspoon of salt per quart to the canning jars, if desired. Fill jars with uniform pieces of meat and add boiling broth, meat drippings, water or tomato juice, leaving 1-inch headspace.

**Raw pack** – Add 2 teaspoons of salt per quart to canning jars, if desired. Fill jars with uniform pieces of meat, leaving 1-inch headspace. Do not add liquid.

Adjust lids and process following the recommendations in Table 2 or Table 3 according to the canning method used.

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**Table 1. Approximate 3-ounce serving per pound and recommended cooking method(s) for various cuts of pork**

Type of Cuts	Simplified Names*	Servings Per lb. **	Preferred Preparation/ Cookery Method
<b>Roasts:</b>			
Shoulder Blade Boston, Bone-in	Blade Pork Roast	2	Slow cook/Moist heat
Shoulder Blade Boston, Boneless	Blade Pork Roast	3	Slow cook/Moist heat
Picnic (Smoked or Fresh), Bone-in	Shoulder Center Pork Roast	2	Slow cook/Moist heat
Arm Picnic	Arm Pork Roast	2	Slow cook/Moist heat
Center Rib Roast, Bone-in	Pork Ribeye Roast	3	Roast/Dry heat
Blade Loin, Bone-in	Crown Pork Roast	2	Roast/Dry heat
Top Loin, Boneless	New York Pork Roast	3.5	Roast/Dry heat
Center Loin, Bone-in	Loin Center Pork Roast	2.5	Roast/Dry heat
Sirloin, Bone-in	Sirloin Pork Roast	2	Roast/Dry heat
Tenderloin	Tenderloin	4	Grill/Dry heat
Pork Leg Center Roast, Bone-in	Leg Center Roast	3	Slow cook/Moist heat
<b>Chops and Steaks:</b>			
Blade Chops or Steaks	Blade Chops or Steaks	3	Grill/Dry heat
Arm Steaks, Bone-in	Arm Steak	3	Slow cook/Moist heat
Top Loin Chop or Center Cut Loin Chops	New York Pork Chop	4	Grill/Dry heat
Sirloin Chops	Sirloin Pork Chops	3	Grill/Dry heat
Center Slice Ham	Center Slice Ham	3.5	Reheat if fully cooked
<b>Ribs:</b>			
Back Ribs	Loin Back Ribs	1.5	Grill/Dry heat
Country Style Ribs	Loin Country Style Ribs	1.5	Grill/Dry heat
Spareribs	Spareribs	1.5	Slow cook/Moist heat
<b>Processed Pork Cuts:</b>			
Smoked Shanks or Hocks		1.5	Slow cook/Moist heat
Ground Pork or Pork Sausage		4	various
Canadian Style Bacon		5	Pan broiling or frying/ Dry heat
Bacon		6	Pan broiling/Dry heat
Ham, Bone-in		3.5	Reheat if fully cooked
Ham, Boneless		4.5	Reheat if fully cooked

One pound of raw pork equals approximately 12 ounces (or 3/4 of a pound) of cooked pork.

\* Adapted from National Pork Board (n.d.)

\*\* Adapted from Burson (1989)

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**Table 2. Recommended process time for Strips, Cubes, or Chunks of Meat in a dial-gauge pressure canner.**

Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time (min)	Canner Pressure (PSI) in pounds at Altitudes of			
			0 - 2,000 ft	2,001 - 4,000 ft	4,001 - 6,000 ft	6,001 - 8,000 ft
Hot and Raw	Pints	75	11	12	13	14
	Quarts	90	11	12	13	14

**Table 3. Recommended process time for Strips, Cubes, or Chunks of Meat in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.**

Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time (min)	Canner Pressure (PSI) in pounds at Altitudes of	
			0 - 1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Hot and Raw	Pints	75	10	15
	Quarts	90	10	15

Information on canning (including tables 2 and 3) was adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at [http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_05/strips\\_cubes\\_chunks.html#TBLE2](http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_05/strips_cubes_chunks.html#TBLE2). The National Center for Home Food Preservation adapted their information from the “Complete Guide to Home Canning,” Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 2009.

### References:

Burson, D. E. (1989). G89-947 Buying meat by the serving. *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska Lincoln-Extension*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1790&context=extensionhist>

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### Resources:

National Center for Home Food Preservation: <http://nchfp.uga.edu/>

National Pork Board: [www.porkbeinspired.com/index.aspx](http://www.porkbeinspired.com/index.aspx)

Recipetips.com Pork Shopping Guide: [www.recipetips.com/kitchen-tips/t--163/pork-shopping-guide.asp](http://www.recipetips.com/kitchen-tips/t--163/pork-shopping-guide.asp)

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