

Chuckwagon's "Cow Kickin' Capocollo" – The Piggies' Collar

If you haven't had "pork collar", I would like to introduce you to it. Capocollo is a great item that you may or may not be completely familiar with in the world of sausagemaking. Sometimes called "Coppa", this delicacy is a combination of pork "collar" meat, fat, cure, and certain Italian aromatic spices and herbs. Around planet Earth, I've noticed everyone seems to have their own pronunciation of the word capocollo – the "proper" southern Italian name for "top of the neck". The most common mispronunciation seems to be capicola. Others insist on calling it coppa. No matter what we call it, the delicious product is made from the muscle of pork at the top of the shoulder, immediately behind the back of the head. This specific piece of meat is available at grocery stores everywhere in Italy as "coppa fresca", and most folks there either braise or roast it. Unfortunately, for some reason in the United States as well and many other countries, it may take some diligent searching to find it.

Unless you slaughter your own animals, you may have to look for an entire pork shoulder at your local butcher's shop. If you are lucky, you may find one with a large portion of the "pork collar" still attached. If your butcher just scratches his head and says, "huh?", you may have to use the next best thing – purchase a nice "bone in" large pork butt with some of the "collar" attached, and cut it yourself, carefully removing the bone. Be aware that many butchers seem to "hack" this piece of meat when they remove it, not knowing it can be used for making a wonderful dry-cured capocollo.

Many folks miss the opportunity of making this delicious product because of the "mystery" behind it. I grew up with a capicollo in sight on the table of the ranch house breakfast kitchen each morning. It was placed there for anyone who had a mind to make sandwiches of fresh sourdough bread, ranch-made butter, onion slices, freshly picked red-leaf lettuce, mustard, and capicollo as thick as a c'boy had a mind to slice it. Most knew that it was always best to slice the stuff paper-thin. After the sandwiches were made, they were wrapped in waxed paper and carefully packed in each rider's saddlebags. About eleven o'clock, miles away from the ranch house, I usually stopped to stretch and brew up a fresh pot of Arbuckle's. And... of course, munch on my sandwiches. Yes, coppa kept my mustache curly! Hey... Superman had his secrets... I had my capicollo! Incidentally, we were on a cattle ranch in the high country. We had no pigs. Shucks, I don't believe ya'll can lasoo 'em anyway. For a little variety, once in a while we traded a steer for piggies or lambs with folks who raised their critters near a town.

Actually there's not much of a mystery in making the stuff and the process is even quite easy but involves just a little time and space inside your refrigerator. Here is the way we went about it: Pork butts just over five pounds were selected, nearly frozen, and trimmed of their fat. We made a simple curing rub from salt, sugar, and cure. What kind of cure? I'm sorry to tell you that in those days (just after WWII), potassium nitrite was still being used. And it was not pink! We were danged lucky to have my aunt, a registered nurse, directing the operation so that no one ate poison mushrooms or overdosed on curing powder. These days, of course, we use Cure #2 in coppa. To avoid confusion, let's make enough "Robber's Roost Rotten Rub" to treat 5 lbs. of pork shoulder.

"Robber's Roost Rotten Rub" **Capicollo Curing Rub For Pork**

- 70 gr. (3 Tblspns) salt
- 12 gr. (2 tspns) Cure #2
- 60 gr. (4 Tblspns) brown sugar

Mix the ingredients together well, then rub the butt with only HALF the mixture. Put the other half away in a safe place, away from children. With your hands, rub the meat on all sides very well then place it in a large zip

type plastic bag. (You should have seen what we used in the old days). Next, place the bag into your refrigerator for a full week.

Following the seventh day of curing, remove the meat and rub it again with the remaining mixture that you stashed away. Place the meat bag into the bag and back into the refrigerator for ten (10) more days. Remove the meat and rinse it well then pat it dry. Place the meat on a rack to dry for an hour while you make a spice mixture we call...

“Cow Kickin’ Capicollo Compost”

Capicollo Spice Rub

- 18 gr. (3 Tblspns.) freshly ground black pepper
- 5 gr. (2 tspns.) garlic powder
- 5 gr. (2 tspns.) Hungarian paprika
- 2 gr. (1 tspn.) ground cloves
- 1.5 gr. (3/4 tspn. cayenne pepper
- 0.5 gr. (1/2 tspn) ground cinnamon

Mix all the spices together well then rub the mixture into the meat using your hands. Pack the meat into tin cans with the ends removed to facilitate forcing the meat into 100 m.m. collagen casings. In the “old days”, we of course, used beef bungs to case the coppa. If you use beef bungs, be aware that by their very nature they have a strong odor and have a few special handling instructions from Mother Nature. Next, it is essential to prick the casings to alleviate any trapped air. No, you can just shoot ‘em full of holes! You must use a long needle and prick the casing in several places, being sure to pay particular attention to the ends where air pockets tend to be found.

Have your storage room at 70% humidity and anywhere between 50°F and 55°F. The temperature must not exceed 60 degrees. Store the coppa three weeks before slicing the meat paper thin.

Best Wishes,
Chuckwagon