

“Cowboy’s Ham Hocks ‘N’ Beans”

(Cure And Smoke Your Own Ham Hocks For A Great Dinner Dish)

Ask your butcher for “short-shank fresh hams” more commonly called “ham hocks”. Be sure to ask for “fresh” – meaning not cured. Hocks are cured exactly like ham except they are pumped to 15% of their green weight (instead of 10% in ham) because they lose about 4% more pickling solution than does ham.

For pumping 25 lbs. of hocks at 15% of their green weight, you’ll need to inject 3.75 lbs. of brine. Using the following recipe, measure the correct amount of nitrite (Cure #1) into cold water and give the piggy’s hocks a shot in several places being sure to inject brine along the bones. What could be easier?

For 25 lbs. of Ham Hocks:

- 5 quarts ice water
- 1 lb. kosher salt
- 1 cup powdered dextrose
- 2/3 cup Cure #1

Next, submerge the “pumped” ham in the remaining brine (called a “pickle”), for five days at 38°F. (3°C.). Finally, the cured ham hocks are removed from the brine, rinsed, and placed into 170°F. (77°C.) water until the center of the meat reaches 150°F. (66°C.). This “preparatory” cooking ensures the elimination of cryptosporidium parvum and trichinella spiralis. Having cured the hocks with nitrite, along with cooking them, you have also removed the threat of clostridium botulinum, campylobacter jejuni, escherichia coli O157:H7, listeria, cyclospora cayetanensis, staphylococcus aureus, clostridium perfringens, and... three pathogens in particular responsible for 1,500 deaths annually - salmonella, listeria monocytogenes, and toxoplasma.

The cooking may take several hours. Be patient and don’t try to rush the process. Use a probe type thermometer with a timing alarm to alert you when the meat has cooked. Note that at 138°F. (59°C.), any possible trichinella spiralis are destroyed. At 150°F. (66°C.), the ham hocks become fully cooked and any threat of “crypto” has been removed. Cool the hocks with cold running water and dry them. Remove them to a cold smoker using a thin hickory smoke for several days.

If you wish to hot-smoke the hocks, skip the water-cooking step described above and use your smoker-cooker. Preheat it to 120°F. (49°C.) and dry the hocks several hours. Increase the temperature to 140°F. (60°C.) and introduce hickory smoke for eight hours. Increase the temperature again to 165°F. (74°C.) and continue smoking until the meat temperature reaches beyond 138°F. (59°C.) to destroy any possible trichinae. To fully cook the hocks, allow the meat temperature to reach 152°F. (67°C.). Cool the hocks with cold water until their temperature drops to a point cool enough to refrigerate them overnight.

To make the recipe dish:

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. dried lima beans, soaked overnight, drained
- 4 ham hocks
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 chopped onion
- 1 green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 cups tomatoes, chopped

- 1 cup tomato sauce
- 1 tspn. sugar
- ½ tspn. pepper
- ¼ tspn. cloves
- salt to taste

Place the beans in the bottom of a Dutch oven and add 1-1/2 quarts of water. Bring the water to boil, immediately reduce the heat to simmer, and add all the remaining ingredients. Barely simmer the mixture eight to ten hours, covered, stirring and adding moisture as needed

Best Wishes,
Chuckwagon