

## **Sons Of Bees Bacon** **(Honey Rubbed, Maple Flavored, Dry-Cured Bacon)** **(Chuckwagon)**

No one on the planet makes bacon better than the English. In fact, a couple of hundred years ago, some wild English cowboy wrangler named Alan Davidson wrote the "Oxford Companion To Food" containing a recipe for maple flavored bacon. I've always suspected that the infamous bacon-wrapped ham (later called "Schinkenspeck" by the Germans), was developed during the seventeenth century in the British Isles.

I've learned over the years, that sugar (or dextrose), does not offset or counter salt - it supports and balances it. The British, it seems, have always been aware of this secret and indeed, English maple-flavored hams are sweeter than many others that tend to border on sort of a savory essence. In eastern Utah, we hand-rub fresh honey into ham as it cures for even more sweet flavor.

All along the upper Green River we see beehives and of course the best honey comes from the little "sons of bees" found near the shorelines of clover meadows near Vernal. Cowboys hand-rub fresh honey into ham as it cures for even more sweet flavor. Here's the recipe that works for us - I stole it from Rytek Kutas way back when.

- 25 lbs. pork belly @38°F.
- 1-cup kosher (non-iodized) salt
- ¼ cup Prague Powder #1
- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup maple syrup
- ½ cup dark brown sugar
- 1 tspn. freshly cracked black pepper

Cut and square belly slabs into a convenient size for hanging in your smoker. Good bacon should have equal proportions of fat and meat. Stir the ingredients together until they are well combined and the mixture is smooth. Be sure to use only real maple syrup. Don't even think about the imitation stuff! Place the bellies into a shallow, lipped, non-reactive pan and hand rub the cure well into the meat. Keep the meat cold as possible while you distribute the cure evenly. Continue rubbing the cure-mixture into the meat and fat of the belly for a few minutes. Next, allow the bellies to cure in the pan, refrigerated, or in convenient, large, 2-gallon, Ziploc plastic bags. Place the slabs belly-side up for two days while the salt draws moisture from the meat and a brine develops.

By the third day, if the brine has not quite covered the meat, add a little water - up to two quarts if necessary. It is important to allow this brine to remain in contact with the bacon as it cures. Inspect the progress daily and re-distribute the cure by turning the bellies over. The cure rate is one day per pound - up to 12 days. In other words, a ten pound bacon is removed on the tenth day, while a 14 lb. bacon should be removed on the twelfth day.

Next, wash the bacon well and scrub away all the surface salt and sticky maple or honey residue. It is important NOT to soak the bacon at this point. Pat it dry and hang it up to dry completely while you pre-heat your smokehouse to 140° F. Smoke the bacon over a drip pan in hickory smudge until the internal temperature of the meat reaches 130 °F. Finally, lower the smokehouse temperature to 115° F. and continue to smoke the bacon until it blooms.

Now is the time to remove the skin if so desired. Simply slide a long knife blade beneath the skin and draw it slowly, leaving as much fat on the bacon as possible. Use the cured, salted, smoked skin to flavor stews, soups, beans, etc. Wrapped in plastic, refrigerate the bacon 24 hours then cut slices extra thick!

Cooked outdoors on a griddle, it is pretty hard to beat. If you MUST eat inside, remember that professional chefs often use a hot oven to cook bacon evenly, preventing it from curling.

Best Wishes pioneers! I sure wish you were sharin' my campfire tonight! (on the north shore of the Green River)  
Chuckwagon