

How Prosciutto is Made

Copied from the website

http://www.prosciuttodiparma.com/en_UK/prosciutto/how

Arrival of the fresh legs

Producers of Parma Ham receive fresh legs from authorized slaughter houses on a weekly basis; the average weight is around 15 kg.

Salting



The legs are first salted by a highly trained maestro salatore, or salt master: the pigskin is covered with humid sea salt, while the muscular parts are covered with dry salt. The leg is then refrigerated at a temperature ranging from 1°C to 4°C, with a humidity level of approximately 80% for about a week and gets a second thin coating of salt which is left on another 15 to 18 days, depending on weight. Salt is the only preservative used in the processing method, no chemical elements are allowed. And here is another big difference from other generic prosciuttos, normally containing nitrites and nitrates.

Resting



Next the hams hang for 70 days in refrigerated, humidity-controlled rooms, at 75% humidity. The meat darkens but will return to its original rosy colour in the final days of curing.

Washing and Drying

The hams are washed with warm water and brushed to remove excess salt and impurities, then hung in drying rooms for a few days.

Initial Curing



Now the hams are hung on frames in well ventilated rooms with large windows that are opened when the outside temperature and humidity are favourable; this allows for a constant and gradual drying of the hams. Connoisseurs believe that this period is critical to the development of Parma Ham's distinctive flavour. By the end of this phase, which lasts about three months, the exposed surface of the meat has dried and hardened..

Greasing



The exposed surfaces of the hams are softened with a paste of minced lard and salt in order to prevent the external layers drying too rapidly.

Final Curing



In the seventh month, the ham is transferred to the "cellars", rooms with less air and light and hang on racks until the curing is completed. By law Parma Ham is cured at least 1 year (starting from date of first salting), and some may be cured as long as 3 years.