

Pirot Ironing Sausage

Interpreted by E. R. Lambert

Introduction: One of the thrills of traveling is meeting fascinating people and sharing their recipes. My wife and I were aboard a small ship, the M/S Arethusia, cruising the Italian Riviera. A native of Serbia, Miroslav Milisavljevic, was hotel manager. In discussing sausage making, he provided me with a recipe interesting from both a culinary standpoint and a view into life in eastern Serbia. What follows is his translation of a recipe, followed by a recipe edited from several internet posts.

The meat description should draw your attention immediately. Have you ever wondered what happens to animals which have lived their full lives and are ready for... what? Well, here's a recipe from what obviously is a poor area of the world, for efficient disposal of such animals to the benefit of their masters. Bear that in mind as you acquire ingredients for this recipe. In the USA, it is difficult to find the meat of any sheep older than lamb, probably because those of us who ate mutton in the 1950's have such bad memories of the taste and smell. Aside from those who live close to the Mexican border, it is difficult to find cabrito and even harder to find mature (cabra) goat meat. Tougher beef, such as steer meat, is hard to find. As for donkey, forget it. I found donkey meat available on Chinese website AliBaba.com, but in minimum quantities of one metric ton. So, this recipe may not accurately represent what is available in rural eastern Serbia, but it should give you an idea of what the authentic sausage tastes like.

This sausage is "of the sudzuk type," meaning that it is a fermented, air-dried sausage with no preservatives. Please have a look at the sujuk recipes elsewhere on SausagesWest.com. The method uses fermenting and air drying in cool weather, and is commonly found in Armenia and Turkey. Those recipes use readily available beef rather than the animals called for here, but the processing is similar. For fermenting/drying instructions, review one of the summer sausage recipes.

Note the lack of nitrite/nitrate. This is probably due to scarcity. I have added instructions on how to use nitrite/nitrate (cure #2) so as to minimize the chance of botulism poisoning. This curing will alter the flavor somewhat, probably to good advantage.

This sausage is of type fermented/cured/semi-dry, similar to a summer sausage. Natural fermentation hopefully lowers the pH, but its main stability comes from lower water content. As no moisture level is specified, I recommend keeping the sausage refrigerated (vacuum packed) until consumed.

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Pirot Ironing Sausage
Translation courtesy of Miroslav Milisavljevic
Hotel manager, M/V Arathusa
(Edited text in italic)

The recipe for preparation is simple and should not be a secret. And if there is a secret, it is in the choice of meat, in their relationship, in the filling [*of the*]hoses [*casing*], in spices, in drying, in ironing... and in the love with which the iron (*flattened sausage shape*) is made. And that's why anyone who creates a ferret [*ironed sausage?*] says that he is his best [*his is best*].

Meat (goat, sheep, and beef in a choice of percentage) is cleared of all unwanted ingredients [*blood vessels, sinew, fat, tallow*], and spices are added to the following percentages: up to 2% salt. 2% pepper (1% sweet and 0.3% hot [*paprika*]), 1% onions and up to 1% pepper (can also combine white and black). From spices can be used laurel [*bay leaf*], basil, skewer [*?*], never add water.

Example: 10 kg of meat, 180 to 200 gm salt, 170 gm of ale [*paprika?*] peppers, 100 gm garlic, up to 100 gm of pepper (also a combination of white and black). As for spiciness, the most common measure of Pirot sausages is one dried hot pepper per 1 kg meat.

Depending on the taste, the amount of individual spices may vary depending on the affinity of the one who makes them, and in the end it is one of the secrets of ironing.

Chargers [*stuffers?*] use thicker pork or beef hoses [*casings*]. After binding in the form of letters U, sausages are dried in dry place with as little moisture as possible. The first ironing with the bottle is the second day after filling, and then every two or three days. Depending on the hose [*casing*] they filled. Sausages can be tried for the first time after fifteen days. ~~It is very important and in time to bind the steamed iron in order not to dry.~~ [*Do not dry too long.??*]

ERL Addenda: "Ironing" refers to flattening the horseshoe-shaped sausages. One picture shows quite a few, hung to dry. Some naturally-occurring mold is present. A second picture shows the finished product, prepared for serving. Thin diagonally-sliced sausage segments about 2 to 3 inches long are skewered with toothpicks. A third picture shows an empty wine bottle being used to flatten (iron) the sausages, one at a time. Standard hog casing is used, and the sausages are flattened to about half normal thickness.

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Courtesy of Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity

<https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/en/ark-of-taste-slow-food/pirot-ironed-sausage/>

<https://www.essedra.com/ark-of-taste-slow-food/pirot-ironed-sausage-2/>

Pirotska peglana kobasica

Pirot ironed sausage belongs to the sudzuk type, more or less hot sausages made of fermented meat of older animals – cattle, sheep, donkeys, goats, etc. The weight ratio of different types of meat has never been strictly defined, but pork meat is never used. The carefully selected pieces of goat, sheep, beef and donkey meat, such as shoulder, ham, chop and fillet, are commonly used raw materials for making ironed sausages. They can be used in combination, for example, goat and beef, or just one type.

All blood vessels, fat and tallow are extracted from meat which is ground and mixed with spices. The combination of spices is the secret of every individual craftsman. Garlic and crushed pepper are frequently used. Ironed sausage should be hot or at least lightly spicy. Producers are resistant to creating a unifying recipe because it is believed that the variety of recipes, and especially meats used, represent distinct individuality and character of the local population.

The ends of the sausages are linked to each other immediately after filling the natural small intestines with mixture of meat and spices and then dried. The optimum drying temperature should be between -5 and +5 °C. The best time to make this sausage is from late November to late December when these conditions are naturally provided. During the one month drying, the sausages are ironed (*flattened*), usually using empty bottle every two or three days. Doing so gently stirs the contents and expels water and air. The final thickness of the sausage is 1.5 cm. It is sliced at angle of 75° and thickness of 1 mm before serving.

It is thought that this type of sausage is part of the Ottoman heritage, because the sausages with similar composition are present in today's Turkey, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Sandzak in Serbia. However, Pirotians are very proud of their specialty, they find it unique and specific to their area and claim that the use of different meats was a result of the differing situation in every single household before winter. In order to save the forage in the winter or to provide selection and livestock categorization, all non-productive domestic (*ated*) animals from a herd or flock were slaughtered and prepared in various forms of durable meat products.

Recently, the Pirot ironed sausages have become more promoted. Because of this interest, the market is growing. Also recently, a local organization of producers was established and the International Competition in Iron Sausage Production was established as yearly event. The main reasons the Pirot ironed sausage is at risk of disappearing are its high price and issues relating to the inconsistency of the supply of raw materials (meats) to produce large quantities of sausage following one standardized recipe.

Pirot Ironed Sausage Recipe

An attempt at a representative recipe,
As interpreted by E. R. Lambert

Amount	Item	pct	remarks
1 kg	Meat (total)		Remove all fat, sinew, blood vessels, etc
18 – 20 gm	salt	2% (Actually 1.9%)	For a safer recipe, substitute the following two items for salt
2.55 gm	Cure #2	150 ppm	Contains 0.0625 fraction sodium nitrite, 0.01 fraction sodium nitrate, to give 150 ppm nitrite and 24 ppm nitrate
17.6 gm	salt	1.7%	
14 gm	Sweet paprika	1.4%	
3 gm	Hot paprika	0.3%	
10 gm	Garlic	1.0%	
5 gm	Black pepper	0.5%	
5 gm	White pepper	0.5%	
1 gm	Bay leaf	0.1%	
1 gm	Basil	0.1%	
1 each	Hot pepper		