**Pork Belly to Bacon**

**Three bacon recipes**

**1) Simple Bacon Recipe**

**Takes.** 30 minutes prep, about 3 days of curing, about 2 hours of smoking.

**Makes.**About 75 thick slices, about 100 ppm nitrites

**Ingredients**

3 pounds of unsliced pork belly about 1 1/2" thick and 6 to 8 " wide across the grain to make slicing easy and to make sure it fits in the frying pan

4 1/2 teaspoons [**Morton's kosher salt**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_salt.html#kosher_salt)

4 1/2 teaspoons ground black pepper

6 tablespoons [**dark brown sugar**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/cooking_glossary.html#brown_sugar)

3/4 cup distilled water

1/2 teaspoon [**Prague Powder #1**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_salt.html#pink_salt)

***Optional.****Make your first batch according to this recipe. For your second batch, if you wish you can add fresh garlic or dried garlic, citrus zest, herbs such as thyme, bay leaf powder, celery seed, chile pepper, fennel, or coriander.*

**2) Maple Bacon Recipe (my favorite)**

**Takes.** 30 minutes prep, about 3 days of curing, about 2 hours of smoking.

**Makes.**About 75 thick slices, about 100 ppm nitrites

**Ingredients**

3 pounds of unsliced pork belly about 1 1/2" thick and 6 to 8 " wide across the grain to make slicing easy and to make sure it fits in the frying pan

4 1/2 teaspoons [**Morton's kosher salt**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_salt.html#kosher_salt)

4 1/2 teaspoons ground black pepper

3 tablespoons [**dark brown sugar**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/cooking_glossary.html#brown_sugar)

1/2 cup [**dark maple syrup**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_sugars_and_sweeteners.html)

3/4 cup distilled water

1/2 teaspoon [**Prague Powder #1**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_salt.html#pink_salt)

***About the maple syrup.*** *I use real maple syrup in this recipe, but it is expensive. The darker grades have more flavor. If you wish, you can use Steens Cane Sugar, pancake syrup, sorghum, honey, Lyle's Golden Syrup, or molasses.*

***Scaling.*** *If you scale up, be sure to count the maple syrup as liquid so this recipe has 1.25 cups of liquid.*

**3) Asian Bacon Recipe**

**Takes.** 30 minutes prep, about 3 days of curing, about 2 hours of smoking.

**Makes.**About 75 thick slices, about 100 ppm nitrites

**Ingredients**

3 pounds of unsliced pork belly about 1 1/2" thick and 6 to 8 " wide across the grain to make slicing easy and to make sure it fits in the frying pan

4 1/2 teaspoons [**Morton's kosher salt**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_salt.html#kosher_salt)

1 teaspoon [**5 spice powder**](http://amazingribs.com/images/recipes/5_spice_seasonings.jpg)

3 tablespoons powdered ginger

1 tablespoon [**powdered garlic**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_garlic.html#dehydrated_garlic)

1/3 cup [**hoisin sauce**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/cooking_glossary.html#hoisin)

1/3 cup honey

1/4 cup [**dark soy sauce**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_soy_sauce.html)

1 tablespoon [**Sriracha**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_chiles.html#sriracha) or other hot sauce

1/3 cup water

1/2 teaspoon [**Prague Powder #1**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/my_ingredients/zen_of_salt.html#pink_salt)

***Note.*** *The total fluids is about 1.25 cups so use that in the calculator if you are scaling.*

**Method**

1) If the skin is still on the belly, remove it and use it to make [**cracklins**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/porknography/cracklins.html). It is sometimes hard to tell if it is still there. It is usually a darker tan color compared to creamy colored fat. You should be able to make a cut in fat with your thumbnail. Your thumbnail will only make a dent in skin. Leaving skin on causes problems for salt penetration, and when you fry it, the skin gets very hard and you probably won't like the texture. Removing the skin can be tricky. Sometimes you can grip a corner and with a knife and peel it back by running the knife between the skin and fat. Sometimes you just have to shave it off with a sharp knife.

2) Pour everything except the meat into a zipper bag large enough to hold the belly. A 1 gallon bag will hold a single 3 pound slab. Zip the bag and squish everything around until well mixed. Now add the belly, squeeze out the air as much as possible and squish some more rubbing the cure into the belly and coat all sides. Put the bag in a pan to catch leaks and place in the fridge at 34 to 38°F for 3 to 5 days. If the belly is thicker than 1.5" [**check the calculator here**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/curing_meats.html#calculator). The belly will release liquid so every day or two you want to gently massage the bag so the liquid and spices are well distributed, and flip the bag over. **NOTE:** If you use more than one slab in a bag it is crucial that the slabs do not overlap each other. Thickness matters!

3) Remove the belly from the bag, and throw the liquid away. Quick rinse it to wash off any thick deposits of salt on the surface. Most recipes tell you to let the slab dry for 24 hours so the smoke will stick better, but, [**as the AmazingRibs.com science advisor Dr. Greg Blonder has proven, smoke sticks better to wet surfaces**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/zen_of_wood.html), this extra step isn't necessary.

4) If you are using a grill, set up for [**2-zone cooking**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/2-zone_indirect_cooking.html) or fire up your smoker. Smoke over indirect heat at 225°F until the internal temp is 150°F, about 2 hours. You can use any wood you like. Hickory is the tried and true. I'm partial to cherry and applewood. After smoking you should slice off the ends, which may be very dark and more heavily seasoned, and taste them right away. They will be more salty than the innards and the fat will be a bit stringy, but you'll love it all the same. Just wait til you cook up an inside slice!

5) Now let it cool on a plate in the fridge. Cold bacon is easier to slice. Use on a slicer if you have one, or use a long thin knife to slice it. Try some thin and some thick slices. You can also cut bacon in cubes to make lardons (see the sidebar), and use them like bacon bits in salads, mashed potatoes, mac and cheese, baked beans, in sauces or to garnish chops, or roasts.

6) Wrap it tightly with several layers of plastic wrap, and then a layer of foil, and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks or freeze for up to 3 months. Do not wrap in foil alone because it can react with the salt. When you are hungry, cook it just like you do storebought bacon.

**Slicing**

Slice across the grain. For perfect even thickness slices, a slicing machine is the best choice, but I rarely use mine because it is a pain to clean. Besides I like to keep the slab intact and tightly wrapped in the fridge or freezer to reduce exposure to oxygen which can make the fat taste funny in a week or two. When I make bacon I usually shoot for hunks 6 to 8" wide across the grain to make sure my thin 9" knife and frying pan fit. If you put a slab in the freezer for 15 minutes or so it gets stiffer and easier to slice.

**Cooking bacon**

I really don't have to tell you how to cook bacon, but here are some ideas that you might want to try. Keep in mind, my recipe is cooked on the smoker so it will not get hard when cooked like commercial bacon.

**Roasting or baking.** Most of us just lay the bacon in a frying pan. That works fine, but tends to overcook it easily. Try roasting it. Line a baking sheet or sheet pan with foil. Lay rashers (slices) of bacon on the foil so they are not touching or overlapping. Better still, put them on a rack in the pan. Place the pan in a 400°F oven. Check in about 15 minutes. Take it out when it is just a little less cooked than you like it because it will continue to cook after you remove it from the oven.

**Smoking.** Amp up the smokiness of the bacon. *On a grill:* Set up a [**2-zone grill**](http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/2-zone_indirect_cooking.html). One side hot, the other side not. Put the bacon in a foil lined pan on the indirect side or on a rack in the pan on the indirect side. Throw some wood chips on the hot side to amp up the smoke. *On a smoker:* It can take forever to cook them at the usual 225°F, so you need to get your smoker hot. If it has a water pan, yank it out of there.

**Microwave.** You can also cook bacon in the microwave. Lay down some newspaper, cover it with paper towels, and jolt it for about two minutes to start. Your microwave may need longer.

**Boiling.** If you put the bacon in a pan with about 1/4" water on high, the water will begin melting the fat and when it evaporates more fat will render and both the fat and meat will be especially crispy. Try this with about 1/2" water and thick sliced potatoes. When the water evaporates the taters will fry in the bacon fat while the bacon crisps!

After you have made the bacon, [**click here to see my recipes for candied bacon**](http://amazingribs.com/recipes/porknography/candied_bacon.html).

**Save the bacon drippings**

While your bacon is cooking lay out a section of newspaper several sheets thick, and cover it with a layer of paper towels. As soon as you take the bacon out of the oven, move it to the paper towel to drain.

Let the fat in the pan cool a bit and then pour it in a glass jar and refrigerate. Hot bacon can melt a plastic tub, so be careful. Save the fat for up to a month and use it to fry. Broccoli and potatoes are especially good cooked in bacon grease.