**Corned Meat Recipe (or, What to Do With a Moose Neck)**

From Douglas Malone

I really like this curing method, for a number of reasons. First, its awful darn good. Think sandwiches, hash, or a traditional Irish stew. Second, in the case of moose, it gives you something to do with that awkward chunk of neck meat that doesn’t hang well in the field. Pickling, or anaerobic fermentation, takes time, so this gives you time. On a float hunt for example, I bring the fixings, which you will see doesn’t weigh much, and bring some of my gear packed in a 5-gallon bucket that I can re-use as a crock. Then, after tipping over a moose, I quarter and hang as usual the quarters, back and ribs. Then I cut loose the neck meat, throw it in the brine, and basically forget about it while I float down the river another week, stopping and hanging the rest of the moose nightly of course. The corned bucket travels well in boats airplanes and trucks, waits for you while you spend another 4-5 days with knives, band saw, grinder, stuffer, white paper and sharpie with the back and quarters back at home. This gives me time to go fishing, goat hunting, or something to beat the stiff moose butchers’ back at this point. I usually can it all up, maybe saving a larger piece for freezing and crock-potting on St Patty’s Day. Hard to beat the ease of use when canned. A bucketful of meat (about 40#) usually yields 4 dozen or more pint jars. Here’s the recipe.

* 2 cups pickling or canning salt (non-iodized is best for combating cloudy jars).
* 2 T pink salt, curing salt, AKA sodium nitrite, InstaCure or Prague #1 for uniform color retention. Grey meat tastes no different but is unsightly to the uninformed.
* ½ to 1 cup garlic. Fresh if you have it. Dice it up small.
* 2 cups pickling spice. More or less, depending on your chef’s tongue. You can buy the premixed stuff (McCormicks brand) or you can custom make your own with bay leaves, whole cloves, cinnamon stick, mustard seed, coriander seeds, peppercorns, allspice, dill seed, ginger, red and black pepper.
* 1-2 cups sugar (any type, or dextrose works too).
* 2 gallons river water. If you are doing this at home, let your tap water stand for 8 hours to dissipate chlorine, which interferes with the curing process.

This is what to do: Warm up half the water and stir in the brine ingredients. Heating just helps dissolve stuff better. It can be done cold, but surely y’all know how to build a fire. Pour in bucket with rest of water and wait until cooled completely.

Add your meat. In the case of a moose neck, I just start with a rough trim (get rid of the big sheets of silver skin and sinew, unsightly blood vessels, ligaments, and of course no black blood. But don’t get too involved. Remember, a) you are in the field and, b) you can trim further later before canning/freezing if you wish). Right off the animal, and into the brine with a satisfying splash. I try to stick with similar size chunks that will brine at the same rate, but just let the muscle size dictate.

Leave a couple inches of room at the top of the bucket, as you will want to weigh down the meat with a non-metallic plate or nice flat river rock. Cover loosely with a folded over towel. You can use the bucket’s lid when necessary for spillage in transport, but the idea is for the brine to be able to breathe.

That’s it. Stir it every 3 or 4 days just to re-mix. Undoubtedly you maximized space in your bucket. Keep in a cool place with the towel as a lid. The fridge is okay too if you have space. Normal Alaska air temperatures in late September are fine. Remember you have a fair bit of thermal mass to mitigate a warm afternoon or two.

Because this is a cure, and is dependent on the strength of the brine/meat ratio as well as environmental conditions, I recommend you keep a close eye on it after the 3-week mark. Take a small piece, rinse, and cook to check the flavor occasionally.

When you like your flavor (usually in 3-5 weeks), give it a good double rinse before packaging. You can add a jalapeno or whole garlic or something else in the jar for fun and flavor. I add water to the packed jars, to within an inch of the top, for extra broth.

I recommend rye bread, romaine, Swiss cheese, mayo and mustard as a sandwich. It’s so easy: pop open the can, pound the juice, make the sandwich. Or cook up some potatoes, cabbage, carrots and onions and throw a jar or two in, juice and all for a traditional Irish stew. Hash for breakfast. Or whatever your heart and belly desires. Enjoy!!