

## *Maple Bacon*

**Yield.** 25 thick slices, give or take depending on how thick or thin you cut them

**Preparation time.** 2 hours to prep, 7 to 10 days to cure

**Cooking time.** 2 hours to smoke

### **Ingredients**

3 pound slab of Hilltop Pastures Family Farm fresh pork belly

3 Tablespoons of Kosher Sea Salt (\*DO NOT Substitute with table salt!)

1/4 cup ground black pepper

3 Tablespoons of dark brown sugar (I usually substitute with coconut sugar)

1/2 cup Grade B maple syrup (grade A is fine, but the B has a deeper flavor) You can also sub with molasses or honey, try it with the syrup first and then experiment when you get the hang of it.

3/4 cups water

### **Do this**

1) I like to cut the slab into 3 roughly equal pieces. They'll be about one pound each. Then you can experiment with each one a little different if you so choose.

2) Now pour all the ingredients, except the meat, into a zipper bag large enough to hold the belly. A 1 gallon bag will work fine if you leave the belly as a 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, aggressively rubbing the cure into the belly and coating all sides. Put the bag in a pan to catch leaks and place in the fridge at 34 to 38°F for at least 7 days. If the belly is thicker than 1.5" add another couple of days. More time won't hurt it and I usually lean more towards ten days. 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.

**Warning.** If you want to do more bacon at once, do not stack the slabs. This will prevent the flavors from penetrating. You need surface area.

3) When the curing period is over remove the belly from the bag, throw the liquid away, and rinse with cool water removing most of the cure from the surface or it will be too salty. Pat dry.

### **Now for the smokin'**

4) If you are using a grill, set up for [2-zone cooking](#). See our article on 2-zone cooking if you're not sure what exactly 2-zone cooking is. Fear not it's very easy. Smoke your belly over indirect heat at 225°F until the internal temp is 150°F, about 1.5 to 2 hours. You can use any wood you like. Hickory is the tried and true. I've tried cherry and Applewood with great results! You won't be able to resist so go ahead and slice off a chunk and try it out. Yummm! Be careful though or you may not have any left to save for later!! Lol

5) When you're done sampling cool your belly on a plate in the fridge. Cold bacon is easier to slice. Slice on a slicer if you have one, or use a long thin knife to slice it. Try some thin and some thick slices.

6) When the bacon is cooled and sliced wrap it tightly with several layers of plastic wrap, not foil, and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks or freeze for up to 3 months. Do not wrap in foil because it can react with the salt. When you are hungry, cook it just like you do any other bacon.

***Optional.** For your next batch you can adjust the quantities of maple syrup or black pepper, and 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. Don't use dried onion, it can smell too sulfury.*