

Whole Baked Country Ham

Traditional country ham has been put on Slow Food's Ark of Taste for good reasons. It is an artisanal process best done with hams from pastured heirloom breeds of hogs. Don't buy one from one of the big companies; look for small producers who hang their hams at least one full year. It takes more time than effort to cook a whole ham but the payoff in flavor can't be beat.

First scrub the ham with a stiff brush and warm water removing any excess salt and mold (mold is a good thing on a country ham). You can remove the hock if you desire, I usually don't. Soak completely covered in cold water for 24 hours under refrigeration or in a big cooler with ice, changing the water three times, or every eight hours.

Place the ham in a large pot hock end up, cover with water and bring to a hard rolling boil. Boil for twenty minutes then simmer for 20 minutes per pound, or about four hours to an internal temperature of 160. Allow to cool enough to safely remove from pot then carefully remove skin leaving one half inch of fat on the ham.

Score the fat with a sharp knife into diamonds without cutting into the meat. Rub with a mixture of 1 cup brown sugar, ½ cup good KY bourbon, ½ cup sorghum (also on the Ark of Taste) and place in a 350-degree oven until mixture caramelizes (the ham is already fully cooked). Serve warm or at room temperature from a large platter, slicing thinly from the large end. Use leftovers in any recipe that calls for ham, especially on biscuits or with eggs for breakfast.

To boil or bake a whole ham or sections, simmer a completely immersed ham in water or a mixture of water and fruit juice (apple, orange, or peach) for about 25 minutes per pound, or bake in the oven at 250 degrees in a roasting pan, without boiling, in water or a mixture of water, brown sugar and vinegar for 25 minutes per pound of ham to an internal temperature of 160 degrees F. Your ham is done when you can stick a knife into it with a little resistance and the meat begins to separate from the bone. Remove the skin and excess fat, return the ham to a roasting pan and add cloves and a rub of brown sugar, vinegar, and dried mustard and broil until sugar is melted. When browned as desired, add pineapples or baked apple slices, and serve at room temperature or warmer.