

Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. This episode is for all of my old fashion kitchen friends, so we're talking about nitrates today, which is actually way more interesting than it seems at first glance and it's also one of the more confusing topics related to the homestead kitchen space. I know for years that I was pretty much petrified of using or eating nitrates thanks to information I would see floating around the good old internet. However, I have changed my tune a lot in recent years. Thanks to some solid research I discovered. So in this episode I'm going to dive into that research and explain how it changed everything for me and honestly made my life a whole lot easier. I'm your host Jill winger and for the last 10 years I've been helping people just like you who feel disenchanting with modern life. I'll show you how to leave the rat race and create the life you really want by learning how to grow your own food and master old-fashioned skills no matter where you live.

Speaker 1: [01:19](#) So second only to pressure canning. I think the topic of home cured meats has got to be way up there at the top of the list is far as the intimidation factor goes when it comes to heritage cooking skills and so much so that I actually included an entire module in my heritage cooking course all about hearing meats at home because I know it confused me for so many years and I know it was confusing so many of you. So I devoted an entire set of videos to it and I'm pulling out some of the content from those videos for today's episode cause I did a lot of intensive research on it last year when we were creating a course. So this is some good stuff. And like I mentioned in the introduction, I've really, really changed my opinions and beliefs around nitrates. Now, I'm guessing if you're listening to this episode is probably because you yourself have come across some of the conflicting and scary information out there and you're trying to decipher what you should do if you should be adding curing salts to the foods that are making, if you should be concerned about it and kind of where to go from there.

Speaker 1: [02:37](#) So I'm hoping this will bring a lot of clarity into your kitchen. So let's just start off making sure we're on the same page and talking about what is curing cause we hear about cured meats and uncured meats, which is usually what they will sell at a more natural or grocery store. But cured meats can be totally done at home and it's actually way more doable than you think to make your own hams or bacon or sausages or whatever. And it's a pretty darn impressive skill to have in your wheelhouse, not just because of you're able to skip out on all of the processed ingredients that are so present in those cured meats, but also because it tastes a hundred times better. You can

adjust the flavorings to fit your preferences and it's really not complicated. So just as a baseline, what is curing?

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So in essence, curing is a natural preserving process for meat that takes advantage of the natural drying properties of salt in order to preserve the said meat, right? And it's nothing new. People have been curing meat for thousands of years before refrigeration was around. This was the way to preserve the meats in warmer weather months. So if we think back to those stories in like little house in the big woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder, they talk about Pa Ingles, Hickory smoking the venison and the salt pork and all of those things because salt was their best friend to keep bacteria from growing on the meat and making it spoil. Now, from all of those thousands of years of hearing processes and different regions of the world developing their own signature styles, that is what has given us some of our most beloved meats today. Things like salami and bacon and ham and prosciutto, those weren't all created just, you know, because they taste good.

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Those kind of came into our culinary consciousness because that was the way the meats were being preserved. And over the millennia we've learned to love those foods, crave those foods, seek them out, cook with them, and now they're a part of our menus on a regular basis. But, we really have those as a result of a lack of frigeration, of refrigeration for many, many years before. So it was kind of a cool history when you think about it. I love that sort of stuff. I get totally geeked out on old fashioned kitchen things as you probably figured out. But anyway, home cured bacon is amazing and it gives you a lot of, um, range of flavors and spices. And the same goes for the hams and the sausages. It's really, really rewarding to get into it. Now. Where it gets tricky is when you start looking at recipes for hams and bacons and things and you'll see them calling for curing salts.

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And when I first started seeing this, I initially was a little resistant because it didn't have curing salt. Curing salt is different from table salt or kosher salt or any sort of sea salt. It's a different completely different compounds. So kinda my first thought was I don't want to have to go buy an extra ingredient. And then I started to see people saying that nitrates and nitrites, which are the components of curing salt are really, really evil. And so I agonized over this, which may sound so dramatic, but I did because that's how I roll. I agonized over this for a while and I would have these books with these cool curing recipes and I didn't use them. And I always felt like it was this big obstacle. So if we want to go back a little bit, historically the addition of nitrates slash nitrites are similar, but a little bit

different in food has been a really big source of debate since the 1970s that was when an article came out that suggested that these compounds could potentially cause cancer in some lab animals.

Speaker 1: [07:12](#) And so it caused a lot of fear and a lot of demonizing of nitrates and nitrites. Okay. And even though today we've had more studies, more research that has come out and proven that they're actually not carcinogenic, they don't cause cancer. You know, those sort of fearmongering things and old wives tales, they tend to persist like crazy, especially with the deep dark dredges of the internet. So it still floats around. Even though like the American medical association has come out saying, the risks, and I'm quoting here, the risk of developing cancer as a result of consumption of nitrates containing food is negligible. And that is, I can link to the source of that article in the show notes. So even though these big associations and scientists have said it's actually not that big of a deal, the myth persists. Now, here's what I found interesting and this is kind of what sealed the deal for me in becoming comfortable using nitrites in my food or adding curing salts to my home cured recipes.

Speaker 1: [08:24](#) 95% of the nitrates we consume in our diet comes from you ready for this vegetables, like especially green vegetables like celery and spinach, and even our drinking water. So if you're very, very much concerned about nitrates in your diet, technically you should be watching your vegetable intake more closely than you're watching your bacon intake. Okay. I'm not saying that that you can go and skip the vegetables and substitute bacon, but you get what I'm getting. What I'm putting down here. We've had a little bit of skewed information presented to us as a whole. Now one of the places I found that had some really good information on nitrates is Chris Kresser. He has a website, he's a noted figure in the natural health space and I'm gonna link his article in the show notes. Um, but he reiterated that the study that originally told us that nitrates were associated with cancer has been discredited in recent years and even major reviews of the scientific literature surrounding nitrates found no link between them and cancer and no evidence that they may be carcinogenic.

Speaker 1: [09:46](#) So again, it was just bad science from the 70s that is still being perpetuated. In fact, more recent evidence shows that nitrates actually can be good for us. Nitrates and nitrites beneficial for our immune system is in our cardiovascular systems. So that's kind of a shocker, kind of a game changer, but it's just time to, I think, do some of our own research and shift this thought process. And I'm, here's a quote from Chris Kresser, his website,

it says, nitrites are produced by your body in greater amounts than can be obtained from food and salivary nitrite accounts for 70 to 90% of our total nitrite exposure. In other words, your spit contains far more nitrites than anything you could ever eat. Okay? So after all of my research with that and I'll share these links that you can check them out yourself. I just decided it was not worth worrying about and I am personally 100% okay.

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Using nitrites and curing salts in my home cured meats. Okay. So on the other side of this, I think I know some of you guys because you're super smart homesteaders and you're thinking, okay, come on. If there's such a debate on this and you know all this conflicting information, I'll just skip it. And then I don't have to worry about it. And of course that's where my brain went initially cause I'm all about omitting ingredients that I don't need and I don't have to buy extras. Right? So I kind of was going on that route until I became more familiar with botulism. Now you've heard me more than likely talk about botulism before in relation to homed canned foods. Botulism is the big scary monster in the closet that has not only made people sick and even killed people after the consumption of improperly canned home foods like in and an underscore on improperly.

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You don't have a risk of botulism unless you are not following canning techniques properly. Right? It's this, but it's the same thing. And botulism can actually cause issues with home cured meats. So like I've said before with a canning topic, botulism is not something to mess around with. It is not just a quick stomachache. It can cause serious, serious damage. It's actually a bacteria that lives in the soil and it loves environments that are moist and are oxygen deprived. And the scary thing about botulism, and this is why it can cause problems in our home canned foods, is that you can't see it. You can't smell it, and it can survive up to 241 degrees Fahrenheit. I just want to pause for a minute. Remember, boiling point for water is 212 degrees. So botulism can survive even if something is boiled. And even if you cook food in the oven and it gets hotter than 241 degrees Fahrenheit, it's likely that the center of the food isn't going to get hot enough to kill the bacteria.

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So we don't want to give it a chance to hang out in our foods, even if we're going to cook them. So why that relates to cured meats is because with cured meats, we often put our meats in a liquid or we let them sit in the refrigerator for weeks at a time in a VAT of liquid. So not only is that a moist environment, it's also oxygen deprived. When we have our ham sitting in a bucket of saltwater brine. When we're doing that, we're inviting that botulism to come hang out. And that is where things get

scary. Now the good news is pressure canning kills botulism, but we're not going to pressure canner hams. So another thing that is 100% proven to eliminate the botulism spores is curing salts. Okay. Which is why in a lot of our home cured meat recipes, a little bit of curing salt is used.

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It will take a botulism out of the picture, which is why when I learned that it's not only, it's not harmful for me and it actually can prevent botulism, which at this point is much more of a concern for me. A real scare versus you know, maybe the potential of a little bit of nitrate causing issues in my body. You know, I'm going to pick, you know, but botulism is the one I'm going to steer clear of the most. So let's talk about curing salt for just a minute. Curing salt is not the same, same as table salt. And sometimes people get confused. Curing salt is also known and sometimes sold as Prague powder, pink salt and stickier. That's more of a brand name, Tender quick or salt Peter. Now salt Peter is technically a different compound slightly, but sometimes people still use the terms interchangeably. So the curing salt that I use and I got mine off Amazon, it's not hard to find.

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It's a mixture of table salt and sodium nitrite and it is what gives our cured meats. When we think about the sausages and the bologna and the bacon, you know how they're always that pink color that is coming from the curing salt and more importantly, of course curing salt prevents the growth of botulism. Now the reason the salt is pink is because it's actually dyed pink. It's not naturally occurring pink, but the manufacturer's dye it to make sure it is not confused with table salt because in the quantities recommended in recipes, drink salt's not an issue. It's not bad for you, it's not bad for your bodies, but we don't want to ingest large quantities of it. Just like with most things, many things in our cabinets a little bit as good and even beneficial. A lot is an overdose and we want to avoid that.

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So I made sure that I had keep my curing salt at a high on a high shelf in a well labeled bag far away from my other salt. So there's no confusion and no one could accidentally grab it and think it was table salt. Also be careful that you don't confuse curing salt or pink salt with pink Himalayan salt. I know that's crazy confusing. They're not the same thing though. Pink Himalayan salt is just a sea salt or a form of like a table salt you can use in your regular old cooking. And it's more naturally pink whereas that curing salt with the nitrites in it is dyed pink. So definitely different. Not the same thing. Pink Himalayan salt does not stop the growth of botulism so different and keep them separate for sure. I think for me at least, it's reassuring to

know that I can now follow my recipes that call for a little bit of curing salt.

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I've been using it in all of the cured meats I've made for the last couple of years, including my home brined ham, which is to die for. And my summer sausages, there are still some cured meats such as, the old school kind of like Italian salt air cured hams where they're not being, they're not being soaked in a brine for many weeks. They're actually packed in salt and then are hung to dry for like a year or more. Those hams are not traditionally, they don't have curing salt in them because they're not in that oxygen deprived environment and they're coated with a lot of salt. So that those types of recipes generally will find even the old school butchers and the shops that have been doing those for centuries, like they don't use curing salt, they just use regular salt just to make sure that you are just following a recipe from an approved source.

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Kinda like with the canning, it's wise to follow the recipes and know why you're adding the ingredients you're adding and go from there. But I can assure you that, I feel way more comfortable adding the curing salts. And I did in the past. The result has been amazing. The taste has been great and it's just nice to know it's not the issue that we've all been led to believe. Oh, in a little side note, as we're wrapping up, I wanted to address the idea of the uncured meats. Cause sometimes you'll see in grocery stores they'll say, no nitrates added and we use celery salt to cure this whatever, lunch, meat, bacon, you name it. The funny thing is is that celery salt still contains nitrates, right? It still is a naturally occurring source of those compounds. So it still has the nitrates in them.

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Uh, it just doesn't have the actual curing salt. That's why it says no nitrates added. But they're still present in the celery salt. And sometimes they're actually in higher quantities in celery salt than they would be in your regular old curing salt. So there's nothing wrong with getting those quote unquote uncured meats at the store. Totally fine. Just know that they still have nitrates on them. And they're not nitrate-free, which shouldn't be that much of an issue if you listen to today's episode and read the research, but just wanted you to know as the consumer, all right my friend, if you are falling in love with the idea of an old fashioned kitchen with all of these amazing foods like home canned vegetables and home brined hams and bacon, I have a little ego guy that I think you will love and it will get you off to a great start. We call it the heritage kitchen handbook and you can grab it for free over at [www.heritagekitchenhandbook.com](http://www.heritagekitchenhandbook.com) and that's it for today. If

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