

Consuming Thoughts

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For Berks Co.



Did you ever wonder how ham became the traditional meat for Easter dinner? Back in the days before refrigeration, hogs were traditionally butchered in the fall. This was done so that the meat could be cured over the cold winter months. The first hams, therefore, were ready in early spring, often making ham the cook's choice for the Easter menu.

Ham, for all its fine and high nutritive value, is a delicate meat and requires care. Cooked hams can be stored in the refrigerator safely for a week. Hams can be frozen, but should be used within two months. Freezing is not recommended as a routine procedure because of possible flavor and texture changes.

Canned hams should not be frozen. Most should be stored in the refrigerator and may be kept

unopened up to six months. Some smaller hams may be kept at room temperature if unopened. These will be labeled accordingly. Check each label for storage instructions.

Many shoppers are confused about the term "water added" on ham labels. When hams are processed, a curing solution is forced under pressure into the meat. After a curing period, the hams are heated and smoked, evaporating most of the moisture of curing solution. If the hams are heated to the point when all the curing is evaporated and the ham weighs the same as it did before curing, then the term "water added" is not required.

Generally, these hams are too dry for most consumers. Hams that retain up to 10 percent moisture must be labeled "water added," a term which may be a little

misleading. If more than 10 percent moisture is retained in the ham after processing, it must be labeled "imitation ham" because it does not meet regulations of minimum standards.

Some shoppers are concerned about excessive fat in canned hams. These shoppers are generally mistaking gelatin for fat. Canned hams have gelatin added to help hold the boned ham together during shipping, storing, and slicing. Gelatin is added in dry form just before the can is vacuum-sealed and cooked. It will fill all the air-spaces and form a cushion.

The old-fashioned, dry-cured country hams are still very popular. Country ham or country-style ham is processed by the dry-cure method, as was done in the days before refrigeration. A dry mixture of curing ingredients, mostly salt, is rubbed onto the ham in an amount sufficient to ensure complete penetration of the curing mixture.

Federal regulations require at least 45 days of cure penetration and additional minimum of 25 days for the drying period. Many hams are cured for longer periods than the minimum requirements.

If these hams are labeled Smithfield, Virginia, Kentucky, etc. they must have been produced in the geographical area indicated. Otherwise they must have the word "style" in the name, for ex-

ample, "Kentucky-style" or Country-style" ham.

In the smoking and drying process much of the original moisture is lost producing a firm-textured

ham. These dry-cured hams take special preparation before they are ready to place in the oven for baking. Consult a good cookbook or reference for instruction in proper handling.

Hot Line Numbers For Easy Reference

Many government agencies have established toll free numbers to assist citizens. You may want to keep this list of Information Hotlines handy.

- Aids Hotline800-342-2437
- Alcohol and Drug Helpline..... (800)821-4357
- Alzheimer's Disease.....800-272-3900
- American Lyme Disease Foundation(800)867-LYME
- Auto & Highway Safety Complaints800-424-9393
- Cancer Information800-227-2345
- Consumer Product Safety Complaints800-638-2772
- Domestic Violence Hotline800-288-3854
- Drug Abuse Treatment Referral 800-COCAINE
- Energy Conservation Information800-428-2525
- Environmental Protection.....800-759-4372
- Family Planning800-882-5440
- Federal Student Financial Aid800-433-3243

- Flood Insurance.....800-638-8820
- Hazardous Waste...800-424-9348
- Income Tax Forms800-329-3676
- Income Tax Questions800-829-1040
- Meat & Poultry Safety800-535-4555
- Medicare Hotline...800-638-6833
- Missing & Neglected Children800-843-5678
- National Council on Aging(800)424-9046
- National Runaway Switchboard800-621-4000
- Pennsylvania Department of Health..... (800)832-0912
- PA Dept. of Health State AIDS Hotline(800)662-6080
- Safe Drinking Water.....800-426-4791
- Social Security.....800-772-1213
- Small Business Administration800-U-ASK-SBA
- Department of Veterans800-448-4663
- Youth Crisis Hotline800-448-4663

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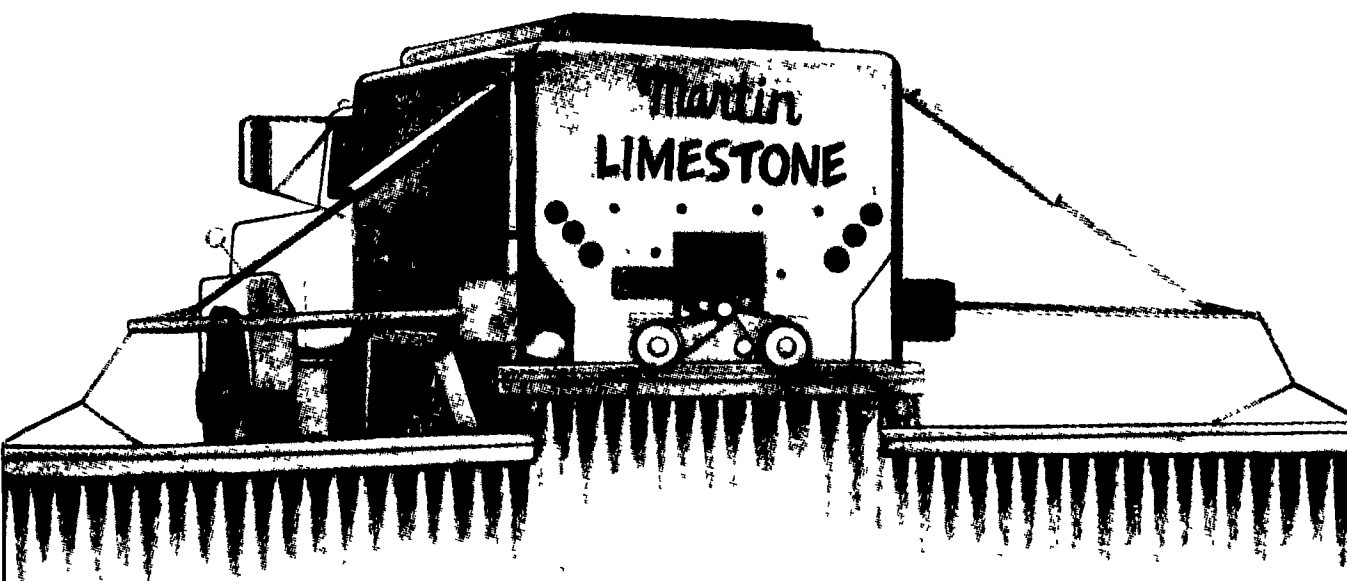
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TV And Your Family

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — How does the television and its many shows fit into the life of your family? Television can be an excellent source of recreation time but balancing your family's TV viewing and television-free activities can be a difficult task. Parents, caregivers and grandparents are encouraged to attend this educa-

tional program to learn the benefits and drawbacks of television viewing and to understand what role the TV should play in a healthy family's life. WHAT: TV and Your Family WHEN: Wednesday, April 13 WHERE: Ag Center TIME: 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. COST: \$2 person, \$3 couples



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