

Corned Beef and Cabbage

by Lydia Lovell

Before refrigeration and freezing made possible keeping food fresh for days, weeks, and months, people preserved meat by salting or smoking. Salting was also called curing or corning, and beef was most often preserved by that method. Pork was usually smoked, although it, too, can be corned successfully; the Irish are famous for curing pork with salt.

To keep beef for a short time, it was rubbed with plenty of coarse salt and set in the cellar for a day or so. It would keep for a few weeks; an old recipe directs that if you want to keep it longer, rub in more salt and "secure it from flies."

Beef jerky was prepared by cutting beef into thin slices, dipping them into seawater, and drying the meat in the hot sun. No further cooking was required, but chewing jerky must have built strong jaw muscles. Whaling men knew beef jerky well.

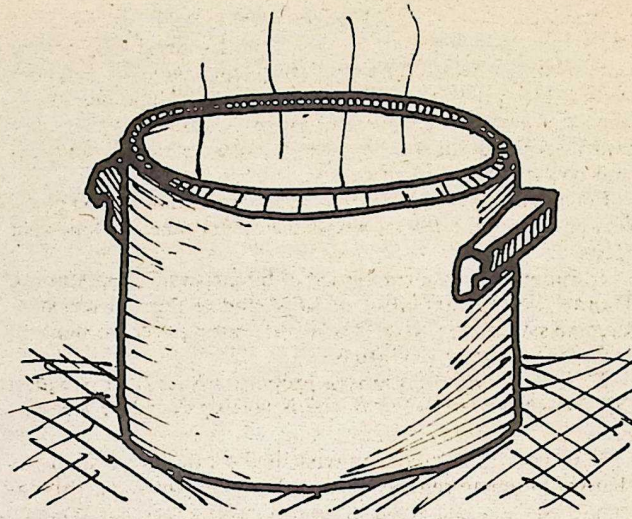
Imagine yourself attempting the curing process: initially, visualize a couple of hundred pounds of beef. The first step is to procure a barrel. Then dissolve half-a-pound of saltpetre in a gallon of warm water. To that mixture, add two quarts of molasses. Put the liquid on to boil and, when boiling, add a quarter bushel of coarse salt. Allow to cool. Meanwhile have the beef butchered to family-sized portions.

Strew several handfuls of salt in the bottom of the barrel; then pack the meat tightly, putting salt between each layer. Pour enough cooled liquid over the beef to cover. Add one ounce of baking soda, "some peppercorns and some innamon," and store in a cool cellar. "The meat will be ready to use in a month and will be very sweet and tender."

Today we can buy corned beef sealed in colorful plastic wrappers that hide their contents, or we can buy our own round of beef (or fresh brisket if we prefer a fatter cut) and preserve our own.

If you are serious about such a project, you'll need to make a few preparations; most of the ingredients for corning are no longer household staples. At the drug store, purchase saltpetre (sodium nitrate). A powder, it comes in a small metal can and keeps indefinitely. Have some brown sugar on hand (or molasses if you want to authenticate the corning process). Use as little or as much garlic as you like, but better too little than too much. Sea salt (found in health food stores) or coarse pickling salt is important for good results.

Starting with 5 to 6 lbs. of brisket or beef round, lay the meat in a stone crock or a deep glass, crockery, or stainless steel container.



In a small jar dissolve 1 t. saltpetre in 1/4 C. lukewarm water. To a quart of water in a saucepan add 2 T. mixed pickling spices, 1 T. brown sugar or 2 T. molasses, 2 to 12 cloves of garlic, and 3 bay leaves, and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and stir in saltpetre. Pour over meat. If liquid does not completely cover meat, boil more water and add. Allow to cool. Cover container tightly; refrigerate for ten days to three weeks, turning meat every few days.

When Aunt Olivia prepared her **old Fashioned Boiled Dinner**, she used beef prepared as directed above. When the meat was cured, she removed it from the brine, washed it, soaked it an hour or so in cold water, then put it on to boil in fresh cold water. When the water boiled, she added a t. dry mustard, a large peeled onion stuck with 4 cloves, 2 bay leaves, a large sliced carrot, and a few sprigs of parsley. She then simmered the beef, covered, for two to three hours until tender. Sometimes, during the last hour of cooking, whole carrots and potatoes, wedges of cabbage, and small onions were added to cook with the meat.

At other times, Aunt Olivia cooked the vegetables separately and glazed the beef after it was cooked. For **Corned Beef Glaze**, she mixed a T. prepared mustard with 1/4 C. brown sugar. After the meat had cooled slightly in the simmering liquor, it was lifted to a shallow roasting pan. Any fat was scored; the surface was covered with the mustard and sugar mixture and 1/2 C. of orange juice was poured into the pan. Basting often, Aunt Olivia baked the beef for about 45 minutes at 325° and served it with vegetables boiled in the

meat's cooking liquor.

Except the beets. Beets, enough to go around, were boiled the day before, drained, covered with vinegar, and kept cold until ready to serve.

To Aunt Olivia's notebook is penned a suggestion: "Throw waste pork or beef brine on asparagus beds. Nourishes asparagus and kills weeds."

When Aunt Olivia decided to serve corned beef cold, she allowed it to cool completely in its cooking water, then removed it to a flat, shallow bowl, covered it with a board, and pressed it with heavy weights to drive out excess water. In the cooking liquor she boiled carrots, white turnip, crooknecked squash, potatoes, and cabbage cut into quarters. Each vegetable was served in a separate bowl while the beef was carved into slices and came to the table on a platter. Vinegared beets accompanied cold corned beef as well as hot.

If memory serves, and I believe it does, Aunt Olivia used exactly the same rule for pickling beef tongue as for corning a round of beef.

Desserts best suited to follow a boiled dinner are those with the piquant flavor found among citrus fruits. While lemon, orange, or lime sherbet is a simple solution, you might prefer to make **Lime Pudding** which has a cake-like top and a smooth sauce underneath.

1 C. sugar	3 T. lime juice
3 T. flour	1 t. lime rind
3 T. butter or margarine, softened	2 eggs, separated
	1 C. milk

In a bowl, mix sugar, flour, and butter. Beat in yolks, juice, grated rind, and milk. Beat the egg whites until stiff but not dry, and fold into the lime mixture.

Pour into a greased 1-quart casserole or into six custard cups. Place in a pan of hot water (water should be as deep as one half the height of the casserole or custard cups), and bake at 325° until pudding leaves sides of baking dish. (Takes about an hour for a casserole, or about 35 minutes for custard cups.) Serve warm or cold, with or without whipped cream, but accompanied by hot, strong coffee.

Anyone who sits down on a chilly Sunday to this New England Boiled Dinner, topped off with Lime Pudding, will rejoice in being well-fed, Aunt Olivia promises. I believe you'll agree, if you try it.