

## Preserving with salt

Salting, one of the oldest methods of preserving food, gives a unique flavour to meat, fish and vegetables, and is also the first stage of pickling and smoking foods. The process is now more important commercially than it is in the home where the freezer provides a more convenient method of preservation. But if you haven't a freezer, salting is worth doing, especially when there is a glut of fresh fish or vegetables.

There are three methods of preserving with salt: dry salting; wet salting or brining; and light salting and fermentation. In all of these, salt draws moisture from the food by osmosis and enters the food cells, inhibiting the growth of bacteria and moulds and preventing deterioration.

**Ingredients** Only absolutely fresh, highest quality food should be salted.

**Salt** Must be absolutely pure as additives can cause discoloration.

**Saltpetre** Added in minute amounts when salting beef or pork (see opposite) to aid preservation.

**Containers** Never use any metallic containers or lids as the salt will corrode them, and don't stand earthenware containers on brick or concrete as they will draw moisture up into the food.

**Procedure** The salt should penetrate evenly, so the food must be either totally immersed in brine, or completely covered with salt. Meat in brine should be turned regularly to avoid streaking. Brining time depends on the strength of flavour wanted. Always follow the recipe.

**Temperature** Always maintain the recommended cool temperature – the rate salt penetrates food is determined by this factor. Brine fish in the fridge, other foods in a cool place.

**Runner and French beans** Wash and dry the beans; slice runners but leave French beans whole. Allow 1lb (450g) salt to 3lb (1.4kg) vegetables. Fill a container with alternate layers of salt and beans, starting and ending with salt.

Press each layer down to remove air pockets, cover tightly and leave for 3 days so beans settle. Top up with more salt and beans, seal with moisture-proof cover and store for up to 6 months in a cool place.

Beans incorrectly preserved will turn slimy and must be thrown away. To use salted beans, rinse, then bring to the boil in 3–4 changes of water. If not all salted beans are used, put a thick layer of salt on top of remaining ones, press down and re-cover.

**Cabbage** Can be lightly salted and fermented to make sauerkraut (see instructions right).

**Raw almonds, cashews, peanuts, walnuts** Shell then bake kernels at 425F (220C) Gas 7 for 15 minutes, turning once. Place in bowl of fine sea-salt and turn till coated. Shake in a sieve. Can also be fried in a little oil, then tossed in salt.

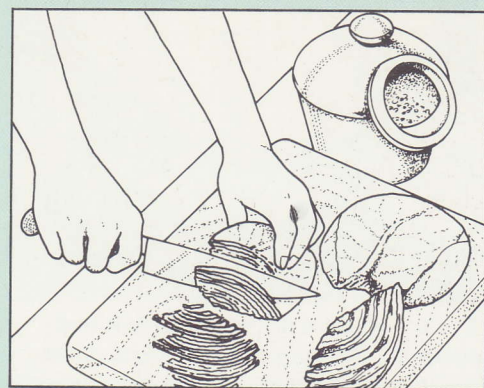
**Fresh fish** (preferably just out of the water) are the only ones to be salted at home. The strength of the brine solution will vary depending on the flavour required, but 2½lb (1.1kg) of salt to 8 pints (4.5 litres) water is suitable for most purposes. Add lemon juice, onion, crushed garlic cloves, dill, sugar and spices for more flavour. Clean and gut fresh fish and soak in the cooled brine for 30 minutes for small fish and up to 5 hours for large fish which are to be smoked. Salmon, trout and eels can be brined before smoking. Fish to be salted only should be left for 7–10 days in the fridge and used within 2 weeks of salting.

**Salt beef** Rib, silverside, topside and brisket are the best beef cuts for salting (see recipe opposite).

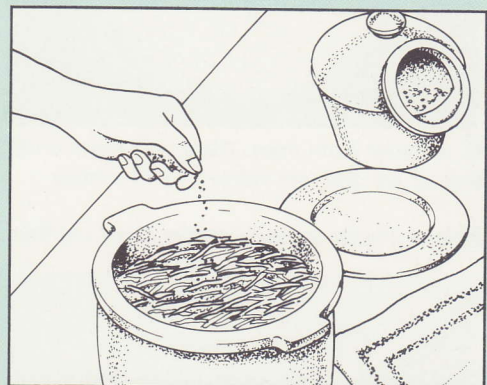
**Pickled pork** Should be best quality. Scrupulous cleaning is essential – scald the equipment with boiling water. Ensure the pork is totally immersed in the brine throughout salting (see page 1785) and after pickling cook it very thoroughly.

**Pickled foods** Very fresh cauliflower, beans, beetroot, carrots, mushrooms, tomatoes and cucumber can all be pickled in brine and either left as they are or be preserved for longer periods with the addition of vinegar. Use 2oz (50g) salt to 1 pint (560ml) water. Add spices, peppercorns, or garlic as wished, bring to boil and boil for 10 minutes. Cool and pour over prepared vegetables packed into clean jars. Seal and store. Don't keep brined vegetables for more than 3 weeks unless vinegar is added. Rinse the vegetables before using.

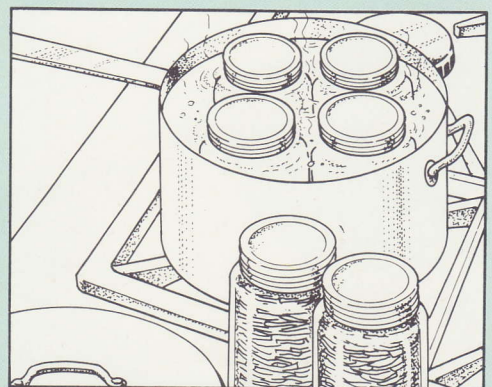
## making sauerkraut



Cut outer leaves from cabbage and reserve. Cut cabbage into quarters and remove hard ribs. With sharp knife (or use a food processor) finely shred the cabbage. Weigh ½oz (15g) coarse preserving salt for each 1lb (450g) cabbage. Up to 1oz (25g) juniper berries, mustard or caraway seeds can be used to flavour a crock of sauerkraut



Pack cabbage in layers in straight-sided stone or earthenware pot or wooden tub, sprinkling salt and flavourings between layers. Pack right to top, place washed and dried large outer leaves on top, cover with cloth, then plate, then weight. Leave in warm place (80F/25C) for 3 weeks



After sauerkraut has fermented it should be eaten within 3 or 4 days – rinse in cold water to remove salt. Or, to preserve, drain cabbage juice into saucepan, bring to boil. Add shredded cabbage, bring back to boil. Pack into warm sterilized jars. Process as Quick water bath method (see page 1857), maintaining simmering for 25 minutes