

The Holiday Ham

Ham is a traditionally popular springtime meal, largely due to farming practices. Before refrigeration was widely available on farms, hogs were slaughtered in the fall. By the time the ham was fully cured and ready to eat, springtime had arrived, making it a feature of many family meals. Now, with improvements in commercial food processing, ham can be enjoyed throughout the year.

Ham is the meat from the hind leg of a hog and is available in many forms, but the most common are fresh, cook-before-eating, cooked, and country. Most of these varieties are available with the bone left in (bone-in) or boneless, for easier slicing.

Fresh ham is an uncured leg of pork. Fresh ham will bear the term "fresh" as part of the product name, an indication that the product is not cured. Fresh hams must be cooked by the consumer before eating; these hams will bear safe handling instructions on the label. If cooking directions are not with the product, allow at least 25 minutes per pound in an oven set at 325°F. Use a meat thermometer to make sure it reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 160°F.

Whole or half, cooked, vacuum-packaged hams that were processed in federally inspected plants and canned hams can be eaten cold just as they come from their packaging. However, if you want to reheat these cooked hams, set the oven no lower than 325°F and heat to an internal temperature of 140°F as measured with a food thermometer. Cover the ham with aluminum foil to prevent excessive drying. Reheating is important for individuals who may be at higher risk for food borne illness, such as infants whose immune systems are not yet fully developed; the elderly, whose immune systems may be compromised by illness or medical treatments (chemotherapy is an example); pregnant women or persons with HIV or other chronic conditions.

Some bone-in hams are large and thus are reduced in size. If a ham is cut in half, the resulting products should be sold as a rump (or butt) half and a shank half. If one or more of the meaty center slices is removed and sold separately, the resulting products should be sold as a rump portion and a shank portion. A shank portion will have more connective tissue than a rump portion.

Hams that are not ready to eat, but have the appearance of ready-to-eat products, will bear a prominent statement on the principal display panel indicating the product needs cooking, such as "cook thoroughly." In addition, the label must bear cooking directions.

Country hams can be soaked 4 to 12 hours or longer in the refrigerator to reduce the salt content before cooking. Then they can be cooked by boiling or baking. Follow the manufacturer's cooking instructions.

When buying a ham, estimate the size needed according to the number of servings the type of ham should yield. Plan on 1/4 - 1/3 pound per serving of boneless ham and 1/3 - 1/2 pound of meat per serving of bone-in ham. You might want to make sure to have some leftover. Then there's a question of what to do with those delicious leftovers. Leftover ham may be stored in the refrigerator three to five days or frozen one to two months for best flavor and texture. Individual slices may reheat to 165° F as measured with a food thermometer in the oven, a skillet or the microwave.

Here are some tasty ways to use the leftover ham. Happy Spring!

Ham and Brown Rice

1 14-ounce can low sodium chicken broth	1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 1/2 cups cooked chopped ham	2 cups frozen peas
1/2 teaspoon minced garlic	Optional: 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan
1 1/2 cups uncooked instant brown rice	cheese

In a skillet, combine broth, ham, and garlic. Heat to boiling; stir in rice and black pepper. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover and cook for 10 minutes. Uncover; add peas and cook about 4 minutes more until rice is tender and peas are hot. Sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top if desired. Serve immediately. Makes 6 servings. This recipe is easy to double and freeze for a later meal.

Nutrition information per 1-1/2 cup serving: 310 calories, 5 g fat, 1.5 g saturated fat, 1160 mg sodium, 35 mg cholesterol, 43 g carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 3 g sugar, 22 g protein.

Cabbage and Ham Bone Soup

1 medium-sized yellow onion, chopped
1 stalk celery, sliced thin
4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
1 meaty cooked or roasted ham bone
1 bay leaf
2 large carrots, diced
2 large white turnips, peeled and diced

1/2 head green cabbage (about 1 pound), cored and chopped into 1-inch pieces or coarsely shredded (about 4 cups)
3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice or cider vinegar
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 tsp. caraway seeds (optional)
Optional garnish: chopped or sliced flat-leaf parsley

In large pot coated with nonstick cooking spray, sauté onion and celery just until onion is transparent. Add broth, ham bone, and bay leaf; bring to boil; then lower heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in carrots, turnips, cabbage, lemon juice, black pepper and cayenne. Simmer until vegetables are tender but not mushy, about 15 minutes. Remove ham bone and set aside until cool enough to handle. Meanwhile, using large, shallow spoon, skim and discard any fat from surface of soup. Remove and discard bay leaf. Cut ham from bone and chop into small pieces; return meat to soup pot. Stir in caraway seeds if you wish; mix well. Cook just until heated through. Ladle into tureen or bowls; sprinkle with parsley and serve. Makes 8 servings.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 63 calories, 1 g. fat, 4 g. protein, 163 mg sodium, 2 mg cholesterol

Special Fried Rice

1 tablespoon vegetable-oil
2 beaten eggs
3 1/2 cups rice, cooked and cooled
1 cup ham or chicken, cooked and chopped

1 cup mixed vegetables, cooked and chopped
2 sliced green onions
soy sauce or hot sauce to taste (optional)

Heat skillet. Add 1 teaspoon of oil. Add eggs and scramble. Remove cooked eggs and set aside. Add the rest of oil (2 teaspoons) to pan. Stir-fry rice, breaking up lumps by pressing rice against pan. Add leftover meat and vegetables. Stir-fry until heated. Add green onions, reserved eggs and sauce to taste. Serve hot. Yield: 4 servings

Nutritional analysis per serving: 310 calories; 8 g total fat; 2 g saturated fat; 120 mg sodium; 40 g carbohydrate; 2 g dietary fiber

Recipes from:

http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/prepare/ham_rice.htm

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/wayne/fcs/HeartandSoulCookbook/Soups/cabbageandhambonesoup.html>

Storage and cooking times for hams sealed in packaging will vary. Please consult the chart at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Ham/index.asp | PDF for more information about ham storing and cooking, and to read a glossary of ham terms.

Sue Flanagan is a WVU Extension agent in Berkeley County with the Families and Health program area. She can be reached at 304-264-1936, Sue.Flanagan@mail.wvu.edu or www.berkeleyextension.com .