

How to make biltong

1. Meat selection

There is a long and interesting list of meats that could be successfully transformed into biltong (everything from fish to turkey) but for the uninitiated we suggest using beef and game as these will suit most tastes. Venison is a popular choice due to its leaner quality but whatever you select the standard factors of *cut*, *aging* and *fat content* apply and will all affect your biltong in the same way they do when you cook with these meats. Choose according to your preference (and availability) but bear in mind fatty meats are more likely to spoil during the drying process and although you can use prime cuts, you generally get better value from these if you cook them. We suggest finding a balance between quality and cost. Meat loses much of its mass in the drying process, so you'll mostly likely be buying in bulk. In this example we're using two kilograms of sirloin bought from a local supermarket.

2. Preparation

Start by removing excess fat. This will help with the drying process, and ensure greater longevity of the final product. Leave some fat for extra flavour, as you like it. Don't cut the slices too thick or they will take too long to dry. Roughly 20cm in length, and 1cm thickness is ideal. Get rid of any gristle/sinew – these bits become extremely tough to chew when dried. Longer strips are more space efficient for drying, and reduce the number of drying hooks you'll need to use.

Basting and seasoning recipe | for approximately 2kg of meat

250ml vinegar (for basting)
1/2 cup ground coriander
2 Tbs ground black pepper
2 Tbs sea salt
2 tsps paprika

The easiest way to prepare meat for drying is to baste and season simultaneously. Start by adding a layer of your basting mix (vinegar) and seasoning spices to the bottom of a wide, flat dish or tray. Lay your steaks flat in the dish, then add another equal layer of basting and seasoning on top. Additional spices like paprika and peri peri can be added according to your preference for spicy flavouring. Let the steaks marinade for two to four hours in the fridge before proceeding to the drying phase.

3. Drying

You can dry biltong in an isolated, dry space (like the Karoo) or a specially constructed chamber which allows you to control the heat and visitations of unwanted guests (flies of the fruity kind). Humidity is the enemy and primary cause of spoilt biltong so creating the right environment for drying is an essential part of the process, especially in colder or more humid climates. Depending on the amount of meat and method of drying you use, it can take anything from 24 hours to 10 days to complete the process. Personal taste also comes into play, as some like their biltong moist while others prefer the rock hard variety.

4. Experimentation

Once you've mastered the basics, you can start experimenting. Try different meats, seasoning, basting and drying techniques for your very own signature biltong.