

DIY DRY CURING CHARCUTERIE FRIDGE GUIDE



Introduction

It's an incredibly gratifying hobby – I have savored it for 20 years. By no means do I see myself as an expert. I am giving you my thoughts, what you choose to do, and how you do it is your responsibility.

This is all about setting up what you need to cure meat both whole muscle and dry-cured salami! It's going to be meaty content!

Used second-hand fridges may have freezer compartments either at the top or the bottom. Some designs mean you can cut the adjoining wall out, although this can get quite involved and messy!

Others I've come across have vegetable storage areas on the bottom – these often mean the upper and lower areas can be joined by removing a plastic wall – quite simple.

Easier to have a whole fridge without a freezer compartment if possible

So when I get to Designs – The first is going to be all about the simplest option I know. It will require zero drilling and is plug and play, open the door once or twice a day and you're winning!

There is a lot of variation in design, so this is an overview and hopefully, some inspiration to start the journey into homemade charcuterie.



DISCLAIMER

As much as I want to guide you to success, I take no responsibility for anything that doesn't work out or if you do any damage to the chamber or yourself.

If you're not confident in this project find an electrically minded or qualified friend to help

My first curing chamber was 'supervised' by an electrical engineer, it was however not the easy plug-in controller type you will see below. It was a hardwired controller box beast!

PS. Throughout this write up there are links back to my blog, it might be easier to go through this on a desktop or laptop - rather than on a phone screen



The Basics

Temperature, Airflow, Good Mold & Humidity

Favorable Dry Curing Conditions (for most dry meat curing projects)

	Min	Max
Approximate Temperature	46°F / 8°C	59°F / 15°C
Approximate Humidity	60%	80%

**So around 52°F or 11°C Temperature
(give or take a few degrees or % of moisture (5% swings are fine))**



70-80% Humidity- is generally what works for most dry-cured projects.

The thing to remember is you can adjust the temperature to affect the humidity as well.



A lower temperature may mean higher humidity



Higher temperature may help to lower humidity

For instance, when a 'wet' cured piece of meat first goes in, put the temperature up a bit to help 'dry' it out a bit more. Useful, especially when one doesn't use a dehumidifier.

This range of temperature is best for slowing bacterial growth but high enough to effectively be performing the drying process.

So you are getting the 'best of both worlds'

Air Flow (Circulated Fan)

A lot of guys put in a fan, but there are a few guys I have seen that don't. It depends on the fridge's inbuilt air circulation as well. A small computer fan I have found desirable ported/exhaust into the fridge.



Moving the air inside to out as mentioned isn't essential in my experience. Exchange the air with an exhaust fan definitely does help.

Or if you have say a HEPA filter on one side, and a fan sucking the air out on the other side of the fridge. This has worked well for a few of my fridge conversions.

Quite often without a fan, I would just open the door once a day, which you'll do anyway to check in on your delicious cuts and watch the magic happen!

Well, at least every 2 or 3 days is my suggestion, you need to keep an eye on the look and smell of the meat as it dries.

A constant fan can be used, with or without a plug-in timer, just pulling out the air for convenience (a hole in the fridge would be needed. Something that switches on for 5 mins a day @ an extraction speed of around 1m/sec is a 'commercial' type setting.)

Depends really on the fridge, some have decent airflow already and certain designs don't need an exhaust fan/external outlet.

You can use a fan that 'piggybacks' the fridge plug (cooling) or the dehumidifier. So it helps cycling when cooling or, it starts removing moisture to 'dehumidify'. But you would be cycling often, rather than 5-15 minutes a day which I think is about right. (timed at night, this means temperatures are at their lowest to keep the system relatively balanced).

Fans/Exhausts - often means drilling a hole through the wall for the fan. I've destroyed a few fridges doing this, due to coolant piping through walls, just directly under the outer metal.

It can depend on the fridge though, and you can play around with this, once things are set up and you are testing it.

Good Mold



Penicillin (type of spores of *Penicillium nalgioense*) is the white powdery mold you may be familiar with on dry-cured traditional salami. (above is a salt dry cured piece of wild venison meat I harvested – this was actually a ‘new’ curing fridge – I inoculated it with some mold 600 (more on this later and heaps more moldy pics later too).

In the commercial context, this is called ‘Mold 600’, you can often purchase this online through certain specialty stores ([I’ve written more about this mold here.](#))

It can begin naturally in a new curing chamber (from what is present on the meat when you put it in) but sometimes the chamber needs to be inoculated. Spraying it with the Mold 600 or spraying some starter beneficial mold, if heard of the white mold on soft cheese being extracted and used inside chambers too!

Once you recognize it, it smells earthy and mushroomy and you know what it is. I’ve put a selection of pictures of white mold at the end.

Vinegar, my preference is malt or balsamic – is what you use to either ‘kick back’ the overabundance of mold or if you have unwanted mold on you’re cured meat as it’s drying.

Just wipe/brush the mold off with the vinegar..

The golden rule for home charcuterie is black mold with a “not-nice/pleasant smell” – which means the project is destined for the rubbish bin. I’ve only had this twice over 20-odd years.

Coincidentally, I was using many Asian spices and really packing them on the outside of venison whole muscle meats. I have a theory that it may have come from the spices somehow.

Peppercorns and chili are used in places across Italy to create more protection on the exterior of meat – these flavors also carry anti-bacterial and fungal properties.

Once you have the right flora growing – it is invisible and just blooms on your cured meat after 2-5 days.

Heating (later for Salami)

I’ll mention some of these points now, but it’s something most guys don’t worry too much about at the start. It’s for raised ‘fermentation’ stages when inoculating salami with a favorable starter culture, which can be quite easily purchased nowadays.

Heating - for Fermentation & other Applications

I went through the mistake of having the heat controller on an outdoor high wattage spotlight to start with (cured meat doesn't like light).

Learned from that mistake!



Ideally, you want to do fermentation in a separate area, since you will probably have long-term projects in the main drying chamber.

Salami Fermentation (not relevant for whole muscle meat curing) is different from the outside white penicillin mold. The goal of inoculating/fermenting salami is to create an acidic environment, unwanted bacteria don't like that acidic environment (you know that tangy taste you sometimes get in salami, that's the acidic (low pH).

But you may want to keep it in mind.

A 'reptile' enclosure-style ceramic bulb (no light, just heat) – is a solid option (see above pic). Light can have a negative effect on meat, especially fat. So a heat source of some kind can be used and plugged into the 'heating' plug-in-play controller.

Another option is having an area or chamber for fermenting as well. An insulated cooler/beer box with a heat source can work, however, it's desirable for salamis to be hanging.

Fermenting temperatures for a short period (2–4 days) of 77–98°F /° 25 to 38°C – can be achieved with a ceramic (reptile tank) bulb inside the fridge. Yes, it sounds on the high end in terms of temperatures, but this is a high bacterial growth temperature, for good bacteria!

The temperature for fermentation depends on the starter culture you inoculate the salami with.

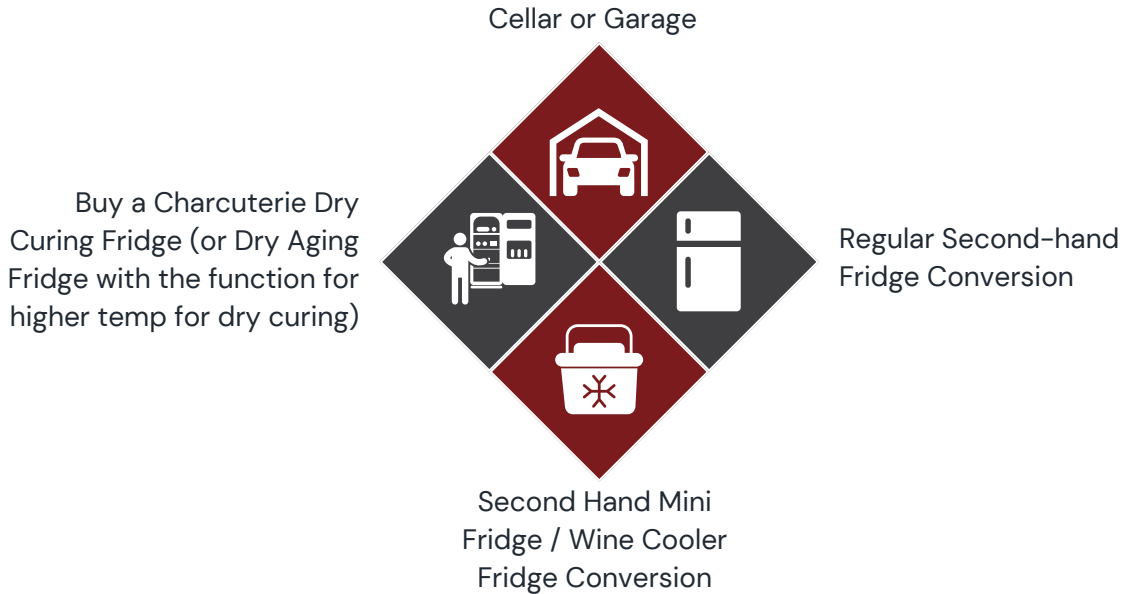
Moisture is normally higher @ 85–90% as well.

This is just one reason why salami is an advanced meat-curing hobby, but again very satisfying, my whole muscle charcuterie course will cover this.

In a tricky situation, I once used a friend's nice moist bathroom! (not recommended), sausages hanging everywhere for a few days. Luckily he has 5 bathrooms!



DIY Options



Cellar or Garage

Pros	Cons
Low Cost	May lead to undesirable outcomes, uncontrolled environment
Simple	Could be inconsistent

Kitchen Fridge Conversion

Pros	Cons
Controlled and insulated	Fridges vary in performance
You choose your size	Vary in Design
Existing racking can be re-deployed	



Wine Fridge Conversion

I will expand on this and write a blog post, once the testing is done, but temperature fluctuations are one thing I have heard has been a concern. (I'm talking of a wine cooler/ not a mini-fridge – a wine cooler that recirculates the moisture again – more on this later).

These are specifically for Dry Cured Meat including classic Italian salumi styles like pancetta, bresaola, lonzo, and dry-cured bacon as well.

My goal with cured meat has always been to get amazing flavor (funky cured and flavorsome, I like to say) and have some fun with my own spices and herb combinations.

Charcuterie Dry Curing Fridge Out-of-Box Solutions

Pros	Cons
No thinking or design – plug and go.	It's an investment at over \$1k-\$20k+
Designed for long term	Lower price range is limited space

Notes

So far I've used the SteakAger Pro 40, it's for dry aging or dry curing. [I wrote a review about it.](#)

It's a much higher level of investment but can give you an instant solution.

Cellar or Garage

If you do not want to build a DIY Curing Chamber, try areas around your home.

I have got into a little trouble hanging meat around the house in the past. So something to keep in mind! :-)

I recommend doing some tests to find out where it could be suitable. The onset of winter in many parts of the world may create climates suitable to hit the right range of temp, humidity, and a bit of airflow.

Ideally for 2-3 months for many whole muscle dry-cured projects.

A logging instrument can make easier work of this, you don't need to focus on this, these are useful for a 'detailed' approach to a curing chamber, so you can see the spikes & troughs for the curing chamber cycles.

Basically, you just need an area where you get around the right conditions, it doesn't have to be the whole cellar unless you want! A wine cellar can be conducive to what you want often.



Testing Temperature & Humidity

If you go down this path, a place with a little airflow can help (or a small fan).

Here is a [link to a page on my website about some testing options for temp and humidity.](#)

Phone-controlled wireless option (with tracking) or manual analog Temperature & Humidity, depending on how you want to set it up.

Kitchen Fridge (Frost Free) Conversion

Used Fridges may have freezer compartments either at the top or the bottom. Some designs mean you can cut the adjoining wall out, this can get messy! (Diagrams of wiring/piping are important for this – putting a cut in the coolant pipes/system could mean the fridge needs serious repair work, which may need a professional..)

Easier to have a whole fridge without a freezer compartment obviously.

So when I get to 5.Designs – I'll first talk about the simplest option I know. It will require zero drilling and is plug and plays, open the door once or twice a day on your go. I came up with a trick for hanging meat without a bracket as well, no need for drilling.

Why Frost Free?

It's a drier environment that suits dry curing a lot more, you end up having to moisten the area and hopefully, the fridge is taking care of the dehumidification (and you can tweak the heat as well).

From what I have read, it's a drier environment generally, and there is a heater that takes the moisture off the condensers when cycling. The one I am currently working on has the coolant mounted on the back wall.

I first plugged it into the Inkbirds, and the humidity stayed relatively high (it's raining also outside, which makes my house moist). But I let the temperature increase, then cycled the fridge, and the humidity dropped to 40% quickly, and slowly climbed up. I leave the humidifier off for the first tests - and see how the temperature controller affects humidity.

What you have to keep in mind, is a piece or pieces of wet moist meat will go in, so you will need some aspect of drying, which often but not always the fridge does in standard mode.

If you end up finding an old fridge with an exposed panel on the back, these aren't frost free, but will more likely produce moisture when cycling on and off. It can still work, it just means the dehumidifier will play an important role.

You can see below the ribbed panel on the back of the fridge - this is what I am talking about.



Question When Sourcing a Fridge

Does it have a cooling system on the back wall inside?

Yes – good, simpler wiring – good chance the sidewalls don't have coolant/wiring through them (if its a full fridge without a freezer), older fridges seem to have this design I have found.

No – Still ok, but would advise the **Minimalist 1** option below that doesn't put holes in the fridge.

All Fridge or Does it have a Freezer compartment?

If it doesn't have a freezer, it's an easier design. If it does, some guys cut through the middle to make 1 curing chamber area. Trust me though, cutting through fridge insulation gets messy!

One of the current fridges I have has a 'vegetable box' on the bottom. There was a divider in between the areas of the fridge, I was able to just take out a removable wall.

What Sort of Inbuilt Air Flow?

Varies a lot with fridges I've modded, sometimes newer fridges have a decent fan, but you need some air flow somehow whether it's inbuilt, whether you leave the door open or put a hole in the side of the fridge.

(sticking a pen or something reasonably narrow in the door to leave a narrow crack will work as well (you don't need to get too technical))

(For my first curing chamber, a 250 Gallon double door, I offset the lid of the compressor on top, used a HEPA filter and the giant inbuilt fan had a drawing effect. Then I put a hole in the side of the wall, there was enough pressure to push the air through...complicated but worked)

Are the Fridge Seals (rubber around the door) decent?

Seals are important for the insulation aspect, checking them is key before making a decision on a second-hand fridge.

What Shelf Racking is in Place?

If you can find a fridge without glass shelving, this helps. Make the hanging process a lot easier.

For meat curing you always want to hang the meat, it means nothing is touching the meat which avoids funky (potentially unwanted) growth. Airflow around the meat is key as well for drying.

I came up with an idea using "expandable shower curtain rods" as a design to minimize drilling. Getting the right one means you can hang like 10-20 pounds of cured meat, here is a [page on my blog about hanging methods for a DIY curing fridge](#).

Mini (Bar) Fridge Conversion (Next is Wine Cooler - Different Again)

I deep-dived into this topic because you can actually get a wine (cooler) fridge that pretty much hits target temperature and humidity, below this is different from a small format mini-fridge. That is basically a small kitchen fridge that runs at the same temperatures as a normal kitchen fridge.

Thermoelectric vs Compressor Cooling

With **wine fridges/coolers** there are 2 options out there, it gets a little technical – I will keep it simple since this is what I learned.

[Thermoelectric coolers](#) (wiki link) **don't dehumidify the air around the fridge** like a compressor fridge. My experience is all with compressor fridges so far, so I stick to them.

With Mini Compressor Fridges

it's really very similar to the frost-free kitchen fridge setup. A lot of mini-fridges I've seen have the cooling exposed but mounted to the back of the inside wall. This is the way I like to go.

Small compact humidifier or external humidifier is the way to go with a mini-fridge, due to these space restrictions.

Wine (Cooler) Fridge - With Humidity Control

Proper cooler wine fridges cost big bucks often!

Small Units are like \$200 – \$1,000+

Some of these setups have a recirculated system to keep corks moist, but condense and evaporate the water. I'm just concerned about the moisture water in a loop system.

There are so many variations of the build as well.

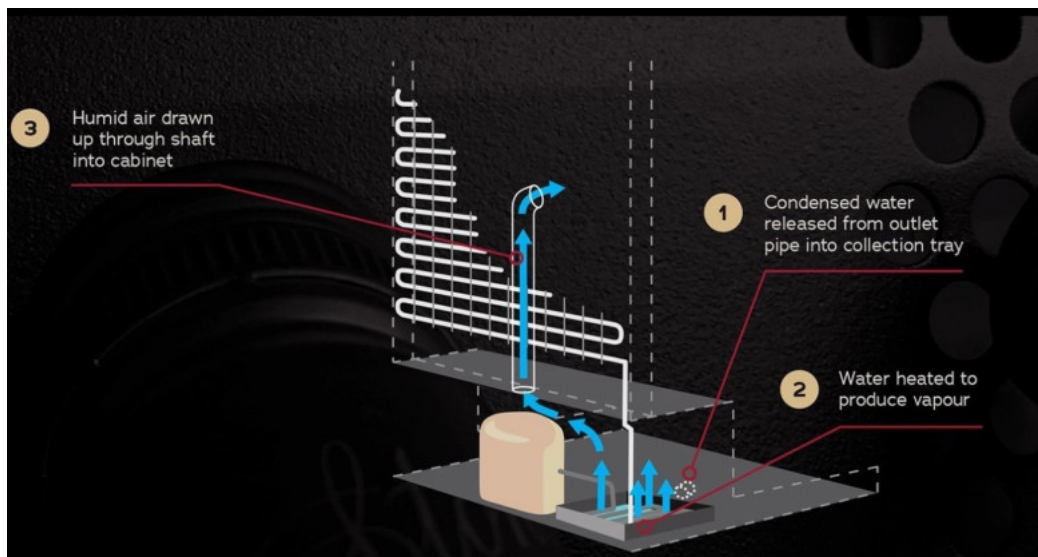
This is an area I'm not that familiar with, I have not bought a wine cooler specifically for meat curing.

If the temperature and humidity are hitting the right areas. Then airflow is the real only other concern I have, also the evaporated water and the quality of this. With an ultrasonic humidifier, like the ones recommended, there is filtration happening for the moisture pumped out.

In the wine fridge I'm talking about, compressors collect the water and release it into a water tray. The water tray is heated to release vapor. It then goes back into the chamber.

This is why a real wine cooler should be 50-70% humidity - for the corks. 50-68°F or 12-18°C approx.

Here is the design that I think could cause issues:



Wine cabinets, coolers, fridges -whatever you want to call them.

Because of the light through the glass door of a wine cabinet, depending on where it is set up, you may need to screen out the light - cardboard, plastic etc. Or some models seem to have darkened UV blocking glass.

A wine fridge sometimes has white or red wine settings, the red wine setting can be similar to the target meat curing temperature. I have also seen some wine fridges that don't have a humidity system.

As I said I can't recommend it since I haven't tried it - if there is just a 'compressor' system like a normal fridge. It's often frost free anyway.

I met a restaurant owner making dry cured meats in 5 wine cooler fridges like the above, she had pancetta, braesola, and other things drying nicely.

Basically, in summer she would just open the doors up for an hour or two. To exchange the air, apart from that these seem to work for her.

Equipment Breakdown



Temperature Controller – plug & play



Analog/Digital Hydrostat/Temp



Humidity Controller – plug & play



Hanging – Racks/Hooks



Humidifiers



Heating



Dehumidifiers



Hardwired Controllers



Fans



Enclosures / Housing

For each of the designs, I will make a list at the back of this booklet to a page on the blog with a checklist.

This chapter is about looking at the components and why to use certain types.





Temperature Controller – plug & play

For kitchen or mini-fridges these are pretty much a necessity, you need to get to the target temperature.

Temp Controllers have a sensor and switch turning it on and off with a probe that goes inside the chamber (about mid-level).



You plug the fridge into the controller, it controls the temperature. You can also set the compressor delay so it's not going off and on rapidly (better for the fridge compressor).

You need either a single (just cooling or heating) or dual (cooling & heating) temp controller. I've put these links on the [blog's checklist page](#), but I also have a [page here on these controller options](#) if you haven't seen them.

e.g. for only cooling or heating (heating would be for fermenting salami, though), I have used the heater for other food activities. It would be better to dedicate the curing chamber to just curing meat. Once you have beneficial penicillin mold present, the magic will start happening more easily!

(Another hack is using a pan of water and your oven on ‘super low’ with the door option, you can get to ‘fermentation’ temperatures’ for dry-cured salami mold culture inoculation this way also.)

When I have had to ‘reset’ the chamber, sterilize it, and get cured meat into it again. It sometimes has taken a while to build up good bacteria.

A shortcut is to inoculate the chamber with the good mold you can buy like Bactoferm 600 (Penicillium Nalgiovense), it’s actually pretty easy to get these days ([Mold Culture Info Page here](#)).

A little spray of the mold 600 will get a curing chamber prepped and ready quickly.

Some guys have changed over the chamber, i.e. unplugged the fridge. Plugged in a heat source to then do the fermentation for a day or two. The best bet is to get a dual input temperature controller, then you have both options.

A lot of DIYers get away with just a humidifier, but sometimes the moisture can be too much for the fridge system, so a dehumidifier is needed to keep the moisture around that ideal 70% mark. Cranking up the temperature will ‘dry’ the chamber out, too. So remember you can tweak it a little (as mentioned).

I’ve been using ‘Inkbird’ for many years, and the products have been used widely in beer/wine fermentation and other applications. ‘Auber’ Instruments are another solid player in this market (one of these products I have used for 13 years so far).

The ‘Inkbird’ Temp and Humidity Controllers must be in the thousands of charcuterie chambers and dens now.

They have come out with wifi options as well. I wrote about the wifi controllers on this [controller page of the blog](#).



Humidity Controller – plug & play

With just a temperature controller, the fridge may be way too dry for meat curing.

Humidity is not so straightforward to control the temperature. You might get lucky and all goes nicely from the start or sometimes it takes some tweaking. The moisture of the meat tends to have quite an effect, variations will occur of course.

The range of accuracy of humidity controllers can vary a lot. So the ones I recommend have been proven especially across the meat curing community of the world. In essence, it is a switch like a temp controller.



Now with a two-input humidity controller ('inkbird' controller), you can have a dehumidifier attached to the lowering input & a humidifier for the other or a fan (if installed into the wall) which extracts the air/moisture and can be 'piggybacked' with the dehumidifier.



Humidifiers

An ultrasonic humidifier is a must for finer moisture into your curing chamber.

If you can have a filling cap that's got a larger diameter, you can actually clean inside the water chamber (every month or two).

You just have to be careful about getting a humidifier that doesn't need to be turned on when it gets power. Or else you aren't going to have things happen automatically! (hard switch? / no standby when power gets turned on)

Checklist has all this, and here is the link to a [page I wrote on suitable humidifiers.](#)





Dehumidifiers

Peltier technology doesn't work at a lower temperature when meat curing

Lots of similar designs with a different badge/brand on them out there.

Little dehumidifiers can do the job. You will find it should take 2-5 days before the tank needs to be emptied but this of course definitely depends on the size and your setup (as mentioned sometimes they aren't even necessary).

Dehumidifier I recommend are [here](#).



Fans

Depending on fridge design, I have seen success without any installation of fans, but that means everyday opening up the fridge or maybe twice a day. It is not ideal for salami down the track, the exchange of fresh air is something to factor in for whole muscle dry curing/salami making.

I recommend either going for a computer mountable fan, you can then add a variable speed controller

A simple plug-in fan can work very well either with one of the other input controllers or 'piggybacked' onto a timer as mentioned.

Or a Small Desktop fan, but be cautious about this, may lead to case hardening. Just a slight bit of air is needed (Marianski books mention 2m/s (2 meters per sec))

Filtering Air - HEPA

This may have a positive effect depending on the quality of air around your place. It's not a key component. Some guys like to put filters on for an extra layer of protection but once the good mold gets going it's not something I have to address in detail.

But worth a mention, one day if you need it.



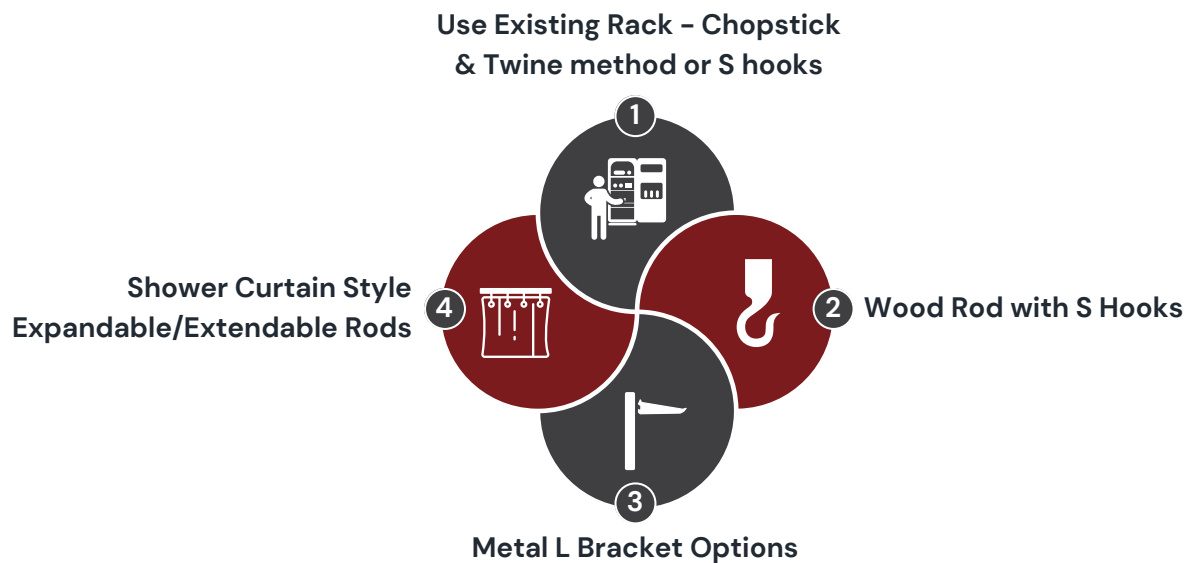
Analog/Digital Hydrostat/Temp

It's a good idea to double-check whether everything is working and worth getting some kind of tool for testing hanging meat around the home. (same as temperature/humidity tools used for checking a cellar or garage - are mentioned on the [blog here](#)).



Hanging - Racks/Hooks

Options



Use Existing Rack - Chopstick & Twine method or S hooks



Using an existing metal grill style rack, you can hang S hooks or use my fancy chopstick & twine method!

Wood Rod with S Hooks/Picture frame hooks



If you get the right length, you can use the shelf holders built into a fridge to sit on a length of wood or metal across. Then S hooks or another hanging system can be applied.

Metal L Bracket Options

If you know the layout of the fridge walls, drilling a few screws and mounting an L bracket can be used to create custom shelves.

Shower Curtain Style Expandable/Extendable Rods



One of the cooler ideas I came up with is using these extendable rods. You can hang quite a large amount on, depending on the rating.

I thought about a digital wireless hanging tool, which could remotely monitor the weight. But this is getting a little too much I think!

For the hanging and racks solutions, I blogged about them, [check them out here.](#)



Heating – for Fermentation, Humidity Control & Drying

Reptile heat bulbs work very well as mentioned above.

You can use a small desk lamp facing down, but some light is still going to be emitted. Avoiding light if possible, since it affects fat/meat during the process.

With a large chamber, I mounted an eco-panel heater on the back, but that was a bit extreme.

Here is the blog link to a page specifically about [heating for the curing chamber](#) (for salami/mold culture fermentation).



Hardwired Controllers

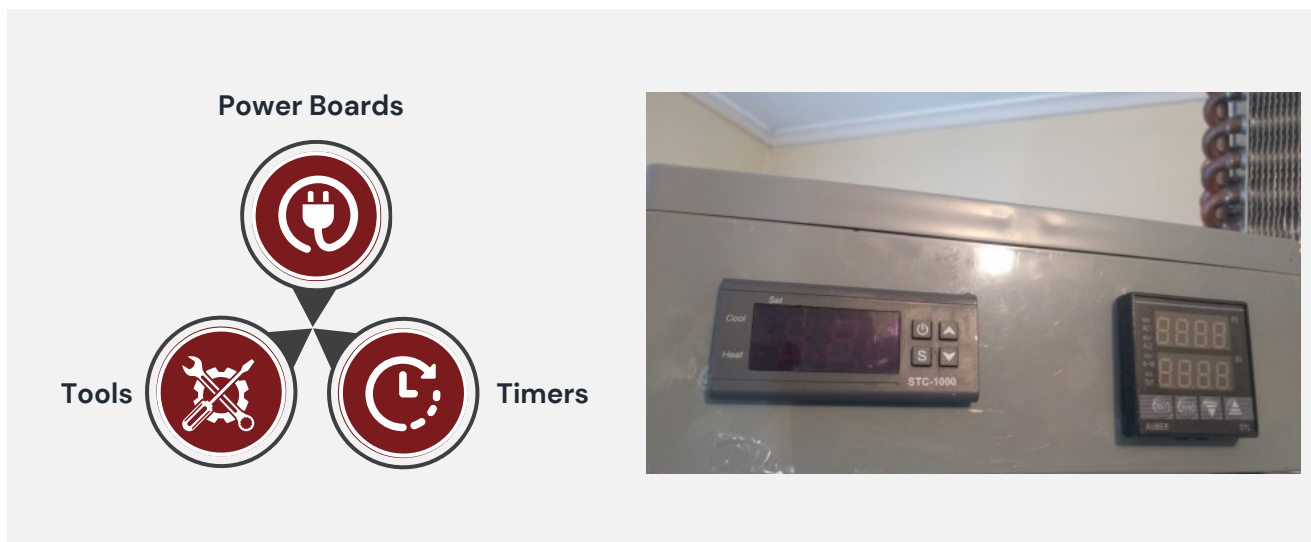
'Auber' Instruments are a great brand of hardwired controllers. Many cured meat commercial producers use this equipment, I have seen. They are covered on the page I wrote about controllers [here](#).



Enclosures

When I had a friend, an electrician, help out with the build and setup, he did a fantastic job of securely and safely sealing all the controllers like this.

Other



Design Options

Kitchen Fridge Minimalist (Plug n Play)

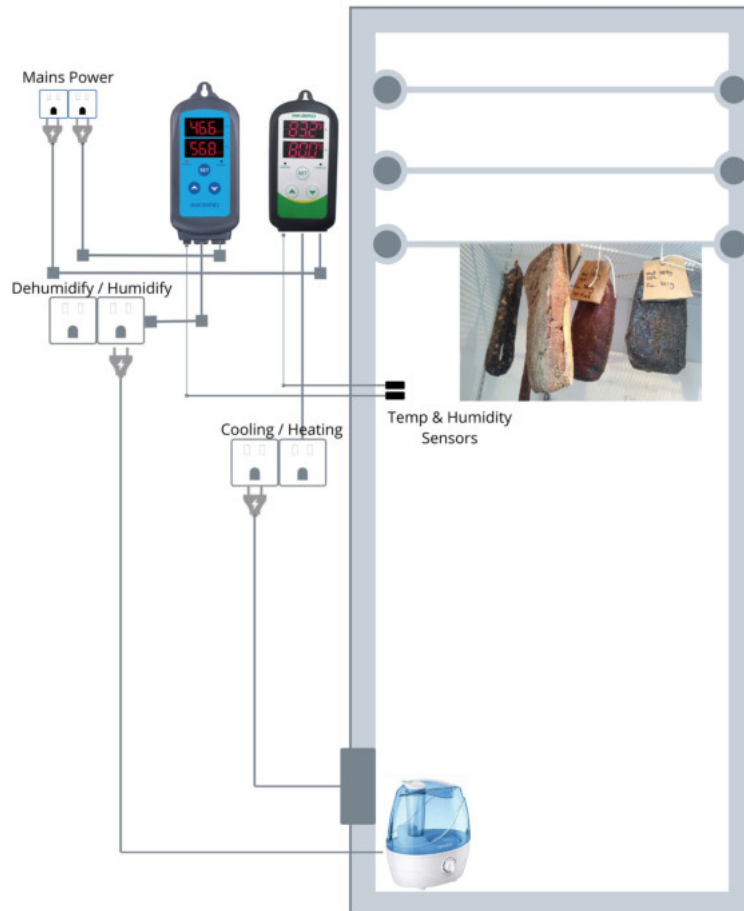
 Plug and Play Temperature Controller

 Plug & Play Humidity Controller

 Humidifier

[Link to Checklist on Site Here](#)

For a frost-free fridge the below diagram is the most common starting point, and as mentioned if it isn't frost free - potentially the exposed panel at the back would need more 'drying' focus.





Kitchen Fridge All-Rounder

All inputs being used – heating with reptile ceramic light (or another heat-producing bulb/system). The variable/non-variable speed fan is double plugged/piggybacked onto the dehumidifier so it's removing the air when removing moisture.



Plug and Play Temperature Controller



Dehumidifier



Plug & Play Humidity Controller



Fan

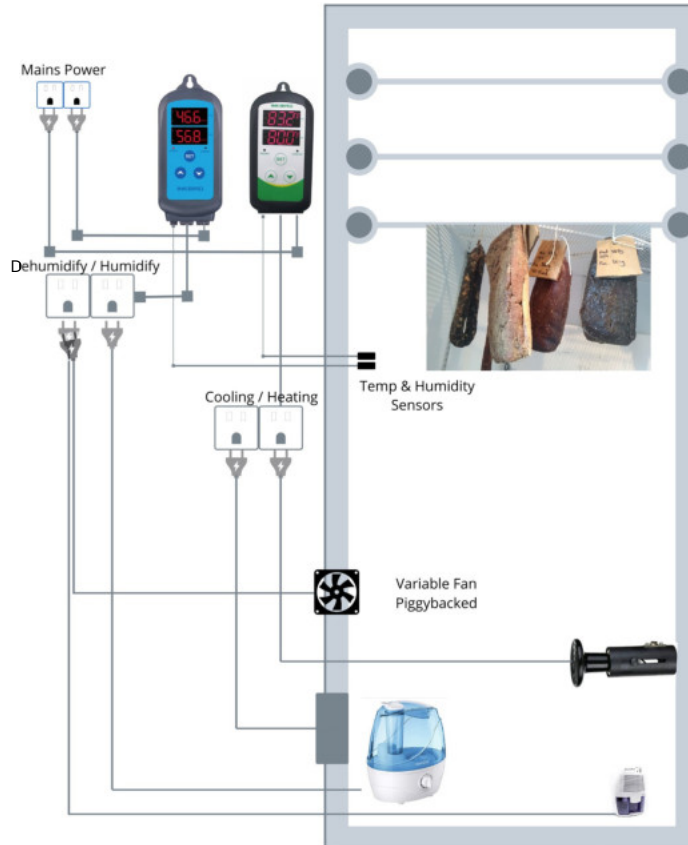


Humidifier



Heat Source

[Link to Checklist on Blog Here](#)





Kitchen Fridge Hardwired

It's quite a lot of wiring, but if you are an electrician or can get an electrically qualified person to wire this, it does minimize cables.



Temperature Controller((Hardwired)



Dehumidifier



Humidity Controller (Hardwired)



Fan

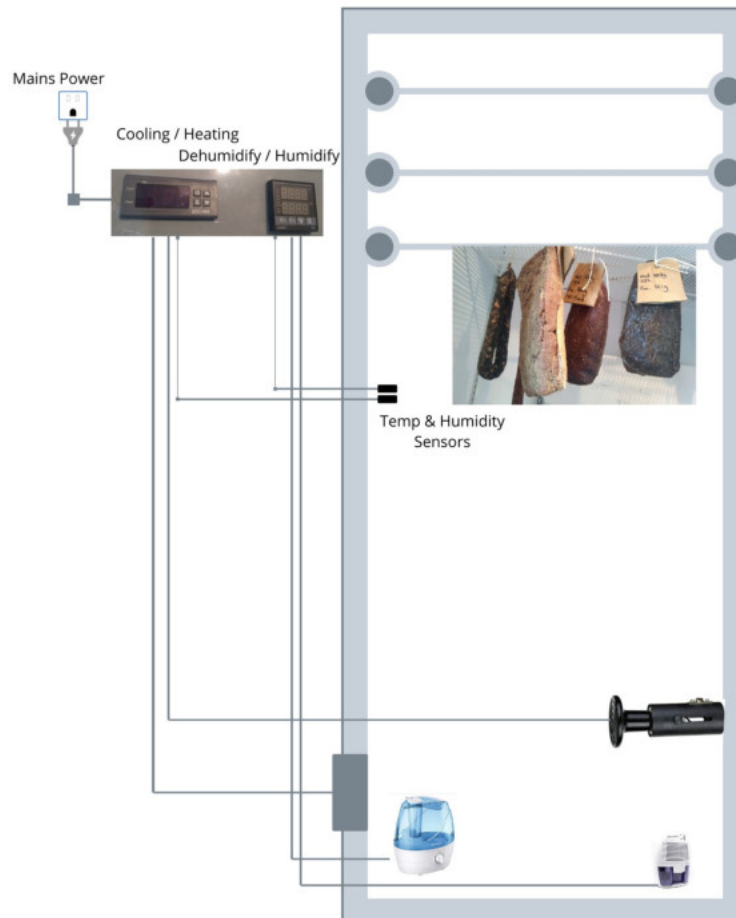


Humidifier



Heat Source

[Link to Checklist on Blog Here](#)



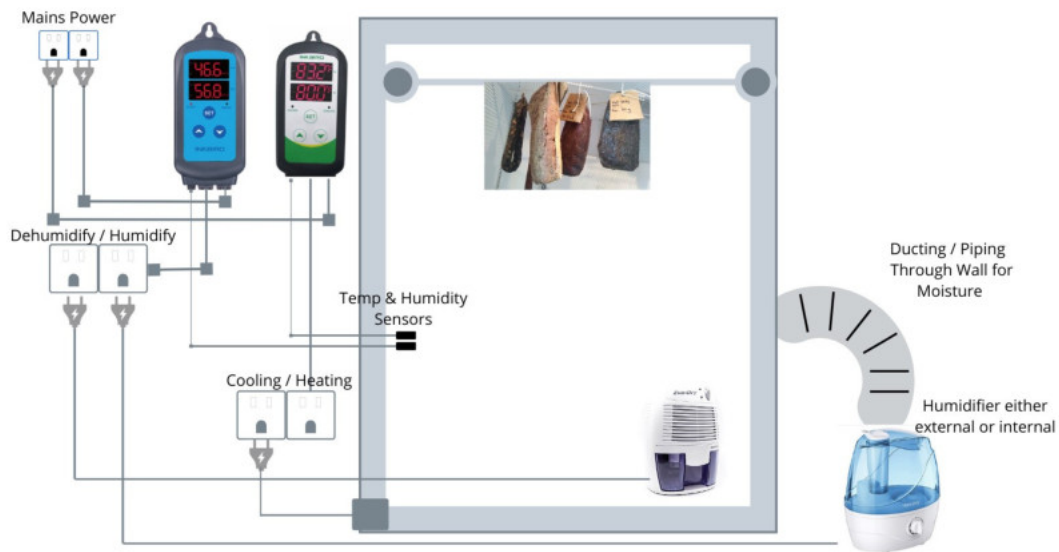


Mini Fridge All Rounder Internal/External

Similar to Other Plug and Play designs, but smaller areas. Possibly external humidifier, but there are small units you can use.



[Link to Checklist on Blog Here](#)



Other Design Notes

Humidifier Inside or Outside Fridge

Either you have enough space to put the humidifier inside or you have it outside the fridge and duct in the moisture. Of course, ducting means making a hole, safely using food-grade friendly "goo"/sealant to seal it nicely and protect the insulation in the wall.

It can create a few issues since you need to keep everything reasonably clean as well (though I have got away with a lack of cleaning often). The maintenance schedule is every month or 2 cleaning the piping.



Making Holes in a Fridge



REPEATED BUT IMPORTANT

Electrical Diagrams of the fridge helps, coolant pipes or electricians may be in the areas you want to make a hole.

Safety first, making a mistake here could mean major repairs to the system – so please be careful.

Thus far I haven't broken a fridge.

Insulation & Metal Structure

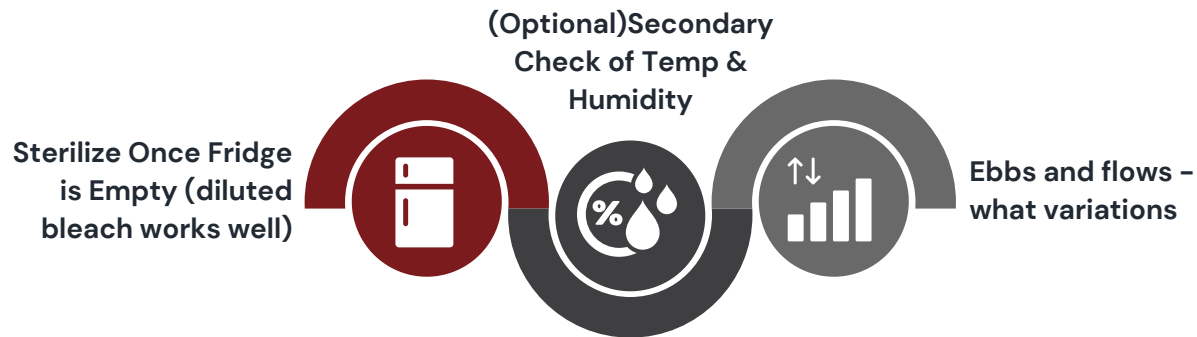
Here are some pics (you can not print them) of what you should expect in terms of the fridge structure.

If you want to keep it simple, find a fridge that has a cooling system mounted on the back of the fridge but visible.

Lots of variations in fridges, so I can't really put them on a list. At the back of the Appendix, there are some examples of curing chambers to look at.



Finished - Testing & Suggestions



The first two are pretty obvious.

I recommend checking if the temp and humidity range is not going too high or down. I've heard of soaking a few paper towels in a bowl to 'mimic' a piece of cured meat hanging. Never tried this though.

Meat is predominantly water and protein - by the end of dry curing, a minimum of 35% weight loss should occur, up to 50% depending on the process and your taste preference.

I wrote a post about curing meat in a regular unmodified fridge, it's all about using small whole pieces of red meat. Around 7oz or 200 grams work really well, because even though the fridge is running like 20-30% humidity and around 36°F/3°C, the outside doesn't have a big chance of hardening, and the inside can be dry.

Here is the [link to the post](#), try using this type of project first. I wouldn't want you to have issues with a large first meat curing batch. It may take 3-4 weeks for this size of meat in your new curing chamber.

You may or may not need that Bactoferm 600 for inoculating the chamber. I've always found it pretty easy to get the good mold culture going without having to resort to this. Maybe this is due to location and the meat I use (which is often wild and harvested and farmed as well).



Please remember making charcuterie / dry-cured meat is part science, craft, and magic!

It might not turn out the way you want every time, but you will always be learning.

A Parma Prosciutto producer I visited had 85,000 dry-cured hams hanging at Slega, Parma. Dr Stefano Borchini was gracious enough to give me a personal tour. He mentioned every year they lose 2-3% of the hams. That's about 2,000 hams a year, it doesn't matter if the reason whether under-salted (not equilibrium cured) or environmental - but it's just accepted.

After 3 months of a controlled environment, the natural moisture in the area means they can open the windows when it isn't raining and close them if it is, that goes on for at least 9 months in the main drying chamber.



Tricks, Mold & Curing Tips



Starting With Small Whole Muscle Meat

Doing small cuts of meat, like ½ pound or 0.25 kg is a good way to get a feel for meat curing and how things operate. As mentioned above.



Minimizing Light (Bad for Fat/Meat)

If the door isn't transparent, then it should be fine.



Setting Temperature Controller Compressor Delay (Inkbird)

The compressor delay on the Inkbird Temp Controller needs to be on the highest setting, which is 10 minutes.

It will stop the fridge from turning on for 10min after shutting off.

The compressor needs some cool down time for the oils inside, this just means you are looking after the fridge.



More Meat, Cooler Retention Temperature

The more meat you have hanging the more mass there is, therefore the fridge won't cycle as much, bonus!



Placement of Sensors

Try not to have the sensors directly where the dehumidifier or humidifier air flow is, it will effect cycling and controllers



Establish Good Mold

As mentioned, once this is sorted – it all gets easier. And it doesn't 'normally' become an issue.

Here is some moldy gallery of Good, Bad, and Ugly *though beauty is based on the perception 'of course' pictures

Good Mold! Here is mainly dry cured meats I have made on the next page, but also commercial operations I have visited in Italy:

White powdery is key, and it blooms with a fuzziness. Once you get a smell for this type of mold, you will understand that it has an earthy aroma that most find enjoyable.

I will do a few shots of what I have encountered as bad most as well. I've had issues with heavy spicing (Asian types), probably due to the mold existing in the spice - this is my presumption.

First the Good Page of Mold, then some bad mold to follow.



The Bad Mold (the bad is also Ugly I think)

it's rare over 15 years to have a bad chunk of cured meat. Often it's been early on with new curing chambers. This black mold is considered a definite rubbish bin mold.

It really comes back to using your senses, the nose, and smelling I find the best indicator on the exterior. Most of these examples have no casing.

I like to consider the funky cheese molds as context as well. Think those extra pungent green/blue style cheeses – they give off quite the funk as well!



Cold Smoking When Meat Gets Funky

Cold smoking is the ancient way – it holds anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties. I've often used it to take control of meat being cured that wasn't behaving itself.

I wrote about cold smoking on the blog. If you want a super simple cold smoker – pellet tubes are easy to use, all you need is a good torch burner, smoking wood pellets, a cardboard box (or any other chamber with some airflow), and the pellet tube – here is a page I wrote about [how a pellet tube works](#).



Using Temperature to Manipulate Humidity

As also mentioned, if you don't put a dehumidifier in straight away, consider raising the temperature 55 to 60°F / 13–16°C. It may not be needed, but it's a trick to keep up your sleeve when the moist meat is first put in for a few days.

Black - Bad Mold, Smell Bad
Bad (Fuzzy White Mold Good)



50/50, Smell Bad - Rubbish Bin



Wet after 3 weeks drying, bad - Rubbish Bin



First Meat Curing Projects - What & How

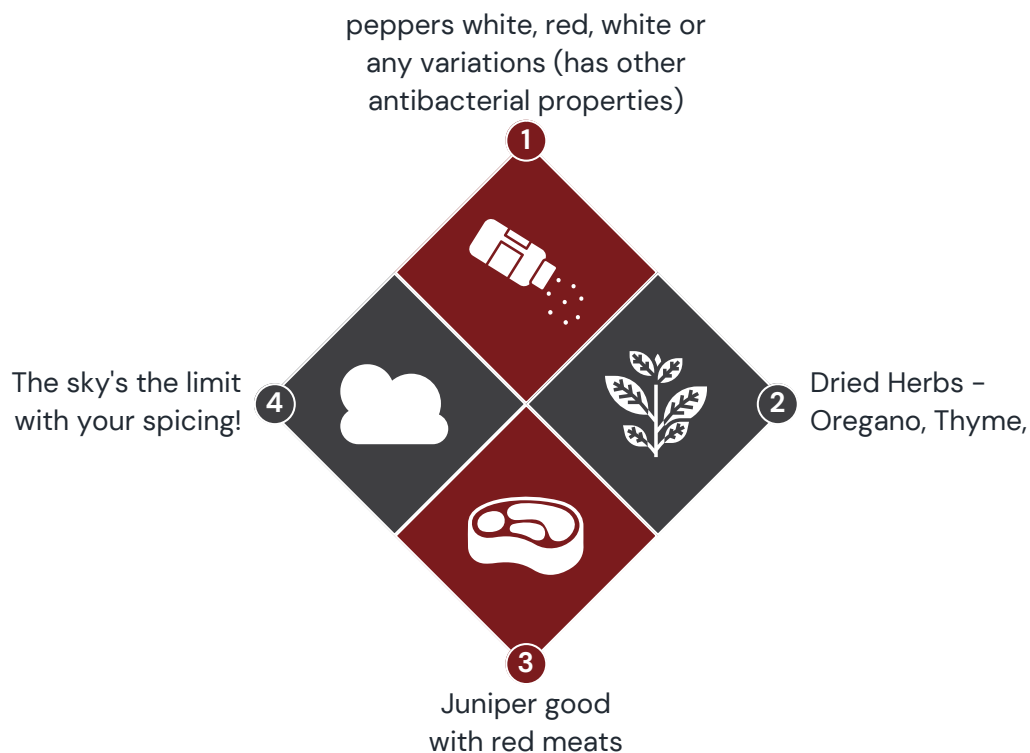
As long as the meat has been properly and fully cured (equilibrium method preferred) then you can give the meat a rinse after or not – I base this on how it smells. I have often left meat curing at the bottom of the kitchen fridge for a week overdue (this would mean a rinse would be good).

a) 2.5–3% Minimum Sea Salt (no additives/caking agents)

b) For a smaller under ½ pound whole muscle (250g) – Pink Curing Salt No. 1 can be used for under 30 days approximately to cure/finish product. Pink Curing Salt No.2 for over 30 days which would not have time for the Sodium Nitrates to break down into Sodium Nitrites. For whole muscle short term meat which is of high quality, I often don't use pink curing salt (that is a personal choice!).

c) Powderize if possible in a spice grinder and apply in a mixing bowl to make sure all cure is wiped onto the meat,

Optional spices (would start with under 0.02% of these spices to the volume of starting meat weight)



d) Make sure all spices adhere to the meat and inside crevices etc – place in Ziploc bag and roll out all air or vacpac

e) Place in Normal Kitchen Fridge, apply weight if you want (I use cans of beans or other heavy objects lying around)

f) Turn over every day or 2

g) 1 inch = 2–3 days of equilibrium curing / 1 pound = 3 days approx.

h) Remove, smell, rinse (optional)

i) Weight and Record Weight

j) Calculate 65% final weight and record (on a cardboard tag tied to meat is useful)

k) Poke Hole (a chopstick works well) and use butcher twine to make a loop to hang in your curing chamber

l) Hang in your new chamber @ 70% humidity / 50F/11C

m) Remove slice wafer-thin and enjoy!

Can store in a cool area or wrapped in muslin and place in the kitchen fridge – however it will dry out quickly in a normal fridge. Leaving to hang in the curing chamber is fine of course.

Congrats if you've read all this! After a few decades of wins, mistakes and learning.

The online charcuterie course will cover what you need to know and all the secret sauces of meat curing with videos, cheat sheets, etc... Once you're ready, here is a link to the [online whole muscle course](#) page.

