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Complete guide to dry aging beef at home



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If you've ever been lucky enough to taste a ribeye steak that has been dry aged 4 – 6 weeks, you've come pretty close to meat nirvana.

There's something about the way the meat tastes so much stronger and is so much tenderer than a regular steak.

Well, in this article we're going to give you the complete rundown on everything you need to know to dry age beef at home.

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Overview of Aging Meat

Typically, all meat has been aged somewhat by the time you buy it. This is obvious since the cattle had to be slaughtered, butchered, packaged, and finally shipped to the grocery store for you to buy it.

The act of aging meat is exactly as it sounds: fresh meat is kept in a temperature controlled room (i.e. a refrigerator) for weeks at a time. While it is aging, magical things are happening to the meat. It begins to become more tender and flavorful.

You can age meat two ways. You can dry age it by letting air circulating around it, creating a crusty exterior that will need to be trimmed off before you cook it.

We'll go through the step by step process later on in this guide, but this video does a great job showing the process for dry aging beef.

How-To Dry Age Beef at Home - 42 Day Aged Ribeye

Alternatively, you can wet age beef by leaving it wrapped in its packaging. Don't worry, we'll discuss the pros and cons of each approach in detail later.

How Does Dry-Aging Work?

When you age beef, enzymes (<https://www.seriousseats.com/2013/03/the-food-lab-complete-guide-to-dry-aging-beef-at-home.html>) that are present in the meat will start to break down the tough muscle fibers that are present in the steak over time.

tough muscle fibers that are present in the steak over time.

In addition, if you are dry aging your steak the flavor will improve over time thanks to enzymatic and bacterial actions, as well as oxidization of the fat on the steak. As time goes on your steak will develop a deeper, beefier taste. Eventually, the steak will begin to take on a pungent, cheese-like aroma as well.

How Long Should Beef Be Aged?

There is no exact age you should aim for. When it comes to aging beef, the choice is 100% yours. However, the longer you age your beef will determine the outcome of your final cooked steak in terms of changes to tenderness and taste.

- You will need to age your beef **at least 14 days before you see any real changes**. Anything less than 14 days is simply not long enough to allow the tough tissues to break down or for the flavor to improve.
- Between 14 to 28 days you will see a noticeable difference in texture, but the flavor will start to really improve past 28 days. When you get near the 45 days mark you will begin to notice deep rich tastes begin to develop within the meat.

Once you go past 45 days your steak will begin to truly take on funky smells/strong tastes and becomes a personal preference for some. Kind of like how some people really love stinky cheese. Remember, it's okay if you don't like it.

As we already discussed, aging is best with beef simply because other cuts of meat like pork, lamb, and chicken will not benefit from aging as they are already plenty tender raw.

- As far as beef goes, you will want to use a large subprimal cut of beef such as a whole strip loin or prime rib (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/prime-rib-vs-ribeye/>).

Prime Rib Roast, 1 count, 4.5-5 lb from Kansas City Steaks
(<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00QXQNZ48?tag=smbbre-20&linkCode=ogi&th=1&psc=1>)



- Prime Rib Roast
- Perfect centerpiece of a truly special meal.
- Aged up to 28 days, boneless and tender.

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- You need to use a large cut of beef because after you have aged the beef you're going to have to cut away the hard outer crust.

In theory, you could dry age a single steak, but by the time you've trimmed it after it has aged you will be left with an extremely thin steak that you will have a hard time cooking to medium rare.

And if you're going to go to all the effort you might as well make it worth your while! So save up before heading down to your local butcher.

Wet Aging vs. Dry Aging

There are two ways to age beef: you can wet age or you can dry age. Both have their pros and cons, but they also produce two entirely different types of steak.



Dry Aged Ribeye vs Wet Aged Ribeye Steak

Wet Aging

As we said previously when you leave a large cut of beef in its vacuum sealed package inside the refrigerator that is considered wet aging. This is something that will occur for some period of time to all cuts of beef you purchase in your supermarket, but you can extend the process at home if you wish.

By aging the beef inside the cryovac package, you're able to get the benefits of the enzymes breaking down tough muscle tissue easily and making it tenderer. However, since the meat and fat are not able to oxidize outside the package, you will not improve the overall taste this way.

On the plus side, you won't have to use any special equipment to age beef this way. Just place the cryovac package in your refrigerator and you're good to go. You also won't have to trim off any hard exterior before you cook it either.

Dry Aging

We briefly touched on it earlier, but dry aging is when you expose a large cut of beef to open air inside a refrigerator for a long period of time. While it is there enzymes will break down the tough muscle fibers inside the meat making it tenderer.

At the same time, bacteria and oxidization will begin to alter the flavor of the beef so that it develops a rich, deep, beefier flavor. In other words, dry aging is a very controlled rotting.

By the time you have aged your beef it will look somewhat like a raisin with a very hard exterior. That part will sadly be inedible and will need to be trimmed off to get to the good meat down below.

Dry aging is not as simple as wet aging; you will need a dedicated space in the refrigerator (or even better, a dedicated bar fridge) plus some other pieces of basic equipment.

How to Dry Age Beef at Home

Dry aging beef isn't as simple as placing a steak on a plate and letting it sit in the fridge for a few weeks. You will need to invest in a few tools in order to do it properly.

Perfect Home Setup

- The first thing you'll need is a dedicated refrigerator that's capable of holding 36°F. Sure, you can use the refrigerator in your kitchen, but as Steven Raichlen points out (<https://barbecuebible.com/2016/03/15/how-to-dry-age-beef-at-home/>), it's not really ideal since meat can pick up on odors from other foods, and vice versa. The best and cheapest option for this would be to use a small bar refrigerator (https://www.amazon.com/NewAir-Beverage-Refrigerator-Capacity-AB-850/dp/B0083H1JA2/ref=as_li_ss_tl?keywords=temperature+adjustable+mini+fridge&qid=1553633320&s=gateway&sr=8-9&linkCode=ll1&tag=smbbre-20&linkId=e19d0363b976ceef1a09f58a6cef8e01&language=en_US).

(<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B06XZZXVJR?tag=smbbre-20&linkCode=ogi&th=1&psc=1>)

- Next, you'll need a small wire rack and baking sheet. The meat would be placed on the wire rack to allow air circulation, the backing sheet would go underneath to catch any drippings. If your refrigerator has wire shelves, you can get away with just a baking sheet.
- Lastly, you'll need a small electric fan (<https://amzn.to/2IRPpmz>) that you can place underneath your meat to ensure proper air circulation. If you have a dedicated refrigerator you could cut a small notch in the corner of the refrigerator seal to make room for the electrical cord.



Step by Step Guide

1. Purchase a large, subprimal cut of beef such as a bone-in rib roast. Look for one with the fat cap still intact. That way when you're trimming your end product, you're only going to

- trim the fat off the top.
2. Place your meat either on the aforementioned wire rack on top of the baking sheet inside the refrigerator, or if you have wire shelves inside the refrigerator, just place the meat directly on them and the baking sheet underneath.
 3. Place your small fan underneath your beef on the wire rack and turn it on. This is to allow air to circulate around your beef.
 4. Now you'll have to wait at least 2 – 4 weeks to allow the enzymes inside the cut of beef and make it more tender. If you wait for 4 – 6 weeks you will begin to see changes to the taste and the beef take on a deeper, beefier flavor. Anything over 6 weeks and you're going to begin to develop some funky flavors and smell from your beef.
 5. Lastly, once you have aged your beef for your desired amount of time, you'll remove it from the refrigerator. The exterior will be covered in a deep red/brown rind and possibly a little mold. Using a sharp knife (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/choosing-and-caring-for-barbecue-knives/>), trim off the fat cap and any hard exterior, and then carve your roast into thick steaks. A steak like this would benefit from being at least 1.5" – 2" thick.

How to Cook Dry Aged Beef

This is where all your hard work pays off! When it comes to cooking a nice thick steak, there are several ways to go about doing it, but the steak that has been dry aged to perfection only deserves the best method: the reverse sear (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/reverse-sear-method/>).

In traditional steakhouses, they would sear steaks using screaming hot broilers that get as high as 700°F to give the steak an unbeatable outer crust. Then they would finish them in a much cooler oven. The end result was a streak that had a great exterior crust and a perfect medium rare inside.

The reverse sear flips that upside down and involves cooking first on a low temp before finishing with a hot sear (<https://barbecuebible.com/2015/06/05/reverse-searing-godsend-or-gimmick/>).



Steven Raichlen (<https://barbecuebible.com/2015/06/05/reverse-searing-godsend-or-gimmick/>), Reverse Searing: Godsend or Gimmick?

When I started smoking meat 25 years ago, no one knew of reverse searing.

Today, you can hardly browse barbecue websites without being urged to try it. The process turns the traditional method of cooking a steak or roast (hot sear followed by slow roast) on its head.

You start by smoking the meat low and slow to an internal temperature of about 100 degrees, then you char it over a hot fire to raise it to the desired temperature, applying the crisp smoky crust at the end.

There are some great advantages to cooking a steak this way. You're able to slowly bring the internal temperature of the meat up to just below your desired doneness before quickly giving it a sear at the end.

By utilizing the reverse sear, you're able to avoid overcooking the interior of your steak, or the dreaded "bullseye" finish, where the direct middle is a medium rare, but there is offending grey meat working its way out from the center.

Step by Step:

1. Prepare your grill to cook at approximately 275°F and place your steak on the indirect side, away from any direct flame/heat.
2. Using a probe in a digital thermometer (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/best-smoker-thermometers/>), you're able to monitor the interior temperature of your meat until it is approximately 15° – 20°F below your desired finished temperature. So if you're planning to cook your steak rare, remove it when the internal temp reaches approx. 105°F.
3. Tent your steak and let it rest while you get your grill as hot as it can physically handle; ideally in excess of 500°F.
4. Once preheated, place your steak back on and turn frequently for 1 – 2 minutes, checking your internal temp every 30 seconds or so. Once your steak is 5°F below your desired finished temp (That's 135°F for medium rare), remove it from the grill, rest for a moment, and enjoy.

Dry Aging Myths

Like most anything barbecue/grilling related, dry aging is plagued with myths and misconceptions. Here are some myths that can easily avoid.

1) You Can Age an Individual Steak for 7-14 Days in Your Refrigerator

This is a common one. The gist of it is this: buy a nice, big thick steak at from your butcher, place it on a plate and leave it in your refrigerator for a week or two and achieve the same results as traditional dry aging.

As we touched on already, it takes longer than 14 days for any real changes to occur to the tenderness of the meat, and it would take even longer to improve taste. Sorry guys, it's just as simple as tossing a steak in the fridge for a week or so.

2) Wet Aging = Dry Aging

Some people think that wet aging a cut of beef is the same as dry aging, but that is simply not the case. Sure, you will notice some improvements in tenderness, but the meat and fat need to oxidize in order to improve taste and that can only be done by letting air circulate around the meat.

3) You Can Dry Age in your Home Refrigerator

Technically, yes you can age beef in your fridge next to yesterday's tuna casserole, but you shouldn't. Beef that is dry aging can easily pick up the smells and flavors of the other food it is kept with. That is why we (and many others) recommend using a dedicated refrigerator to age your meat.

Wrapping it up

We hope you liked this article. Have you ever dry aged beef at home before? What did you like or not like? Do you think we got it right in this article, or are there any major points we missed? Leave us a comment down below with your thoughts!

Now, head out to your local butcher and pick yourself up a nice hunk of prime grade rib eye and start experimenting with different lengths of time to find out how old and funky your dream steak is!

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JEFF HILLYARD

I'm a self-taught home cook with a passion and love for all things meaty and delicious. If it either: a) can be cooked over fire, b) is delicious, or c) used to be alive – I'll probably love writing about it (and eating it). With a back yard full of grills and smokers (five and counting!), I am constantly learning new techniques and creating new recipes.

Weber Smokey Mountain Reivew & Buying Guide (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/weber-smokey-mountain-review/>)

If you are ready to get serious about smoking meat in your own backyard chances are you are seriously considering picking up a Weber Smokey

READ MORE » ([HTTPS://WWW.SMOKEDBBQSOURCE.COM/WEBER-SMOKEY-MOUNTAIN-REVIEW/](https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/weber-smokey-mountain-review/))

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REVIEWS



Pit Boss VS Traeger: Which Pellet Grill Should you Buy? (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/pit-boss-vs-traeger/>)

So you've decided to invest in a wood pellet grill but still haven't decided which brand to buy. Traeger and Pit Boss make some of

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2 Responses

Nick says:

April 3, 2018 at 11:05 pm (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/dry-aging-beef-at-home/#comment-391>)

All looks good with your description of the process. However, you did leave out what I consider to be an important factor. And that is that the constant temperature in one's bar fridge should be below 40 degrees F. Preferably, it should sit at 36F, give or take two degrees. This worked well for me.

Great article. Thanks.

Reply

Bob says:

April 26, 2019 at 11:06 pm (<https://www.smokedbbqsource.com/dry-aging-beef-at-home/#comment-721>)

Check out umai dry age bags. You can do that in the fridge with the rest of your food without any smell transfer.

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