

## September on Blue Mountain

*Wasn't it a perfect Sunday?  
You mowed our long, sloping lawn.  
Sweat pored off you  
in rivulets  
onto the arm of your chair.  
I baked steamy pies—  
peach and fruity-peach  
with leftover apples and grapes.  
Not to waste them.*

*One would have thought  
we were leftovers too,  
but at sixty-nine you are strong.  
So am I.  
Learning to live on a mountain  
close to snakes and rain,  
inside clouds and freezing winds,  
is nothing compared with  
inner storms and losses  
both of us have faced already  
in other times and places.*

*Now is then and now will be.  
Here the copperhead lurks  
in the undergrowth  
behind the next log.  
But you in high boots  
are prepared with your stick,  
and I with my watchful eyes.*

*The groceries run out.  
I gather up leftovers:  
nothing is wasted really.  
Not old apples nor grapes.  
Not your first love, nor mine.  
Not divorces, nor deaths.  
They all come home to us daily  
in the forest,  
in dreams,  
in early morning stillness,  
in misted clouds  
hanging over our mountain.*

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Linden, VA

## Drying Meat

*By Tom Baith*

The storing of preserved food is not a human phenomenon. Insects and certain mammals were storing naturally dried nuts and grains long before humans came on the scene.

All foods deteriorate when kept beyond their natural life, which might be anything from a few hours to a year or more. Foods are under constant attack from microorganisms, and their own enzymes.

Preservation methods are designed to minimize spoilage or preferably remove it entirely. Until the 19th century, and the discovery of microorganisms, methods of preservation had been discovered primarily by chance.

After Pasteur demonstrated the role that microorganisms play in the decomposition of food, progress in preservation techniques became systematic and advanced rapidly. The most widely used methods of preservation today include heat sterilization and chemical preservatives. Many of the old methods of preservation, such as smoking, are only retained for the flavor they impart.

**Salting** was a traditional method of preserving which involved applying salt either as a brine or dry salting. Microorganisms need water to survive. The application of salt prevents microorganisms from getting water and inactivates them. If you use enough salt it will stop virtually all organisms as well as inhibit the action of enzymes. In the home processing of meat or fish, dry salting is recommended over brining. Brining requires more carefully controlled temperatures than dry salting and the flavor is less desirable. Dry salting is a relatively simple process. Rub the surface of the meat to be cured with a combination of salt, saltpeter and sugar, then allow it to cure for several days.

**Drying** is the oldest form of food preservation. It works because dried

food is not spoiled by yeasts, molds, or bacteria as long as the amount of water in the meat is not enough to support life processes. Even highly perishable items like fish and shellfish can be successfully preserved by drying.

Unfortunately, there are few climates that lend themselves ideally to drying. In deserts, the relative humidity is typically low and makes for an ideal climate for drying. In areas of higher humidity the item may need to be placed directly in the sun. Rapid drying is necessary to forestall decomposition. More certain results are obtained by purchasing a heat drying system that can be easily regulated.

**Smoking** is usually an adjunct to salting and drying. A layer of chemicals with antiseptic quality cover the surface of the meat or fish. Smoking has little importance as a method of preservation today.

**Jerky** is a product of salting, drying or smoking or any combination thereof. This dried meat has origins in South Africa where it is called biltong. Originally a food used by Dutch pioneers who migrated northward from the Cape, it consisted of dried strips of meat cut from game or failing oxen.

### A Jerky recipe

To make jerky, cut lean meat (such as round) against the grain into strips 2 to 3 inches wide, ¼ inch thick and about 6 inches long. Salt and pepper the strips to taste and hang from the bars of an oven rack in a 175 degree oven. The jerky should be ready in about 5 hours. Leave the oven door ajar to allow the moisture to escape. The jerky should be very dry but slightly flexible. Place in a covered container and store in a cool area.

This is a basic recipe to which other spices may be added or you can marinate the meat. To marinate, place the meat in your favorite marinade for a few hours and wipe dry with a paper towel. Drying time might need to be extended because of the excess moisture from the marinade. Δ