

Rendering LARD Cooking and Candle Makings Forgotten Skill



When I think of lard I think “bad for me” or “heart attack in the making”. Yet there are several things about lard that makes it a superior fat to many (especially all of those new-fangled fats).

First, it’s very high in vitamin D, a vitamin we are often in great need of.

Second, one author was pointing out that lard’s composition was the closest to our body fat, so they considered it easier for us to handle.

Thirdly, it’s the original shortening! The shortening you can buy at the stores is decidedly one of the worst things for you. If you are going to stay away from something, stay away from that. Lard was once used in pies and tarts.

Fourth, it’s a great fat to use at high temperatures too.

Last, lard is definitely a food that our great grandmothers would recognize, so it passes their “real food” test hands down.

There are many other uses for lard, like soap and candle making and it also makes the best Mexican food.

Did you know lard was the traditional fat used in China, Japan, in Mexico and throughout Central and South America? Wow ... won tons, egg rolls, fried rice, tempura, refried beans and tamales. There are so many delicious things to make with lard and tallow.

McDonald’s actually used beef tallow for their French fries up until 1983, when they finally succumbed to soybean oil. Tallow (horse and beef) is the traditional fat used for French fries in France.

Technically lard isn't considered a food, it was however vital to the cooking process for many years and was a necessary pioneering activity.

Back in the “good old days,” lard was the only fat that was used besides butter for cooking, baking or even spreading on bread for a sandwich. Lard has been used for centuries and centuries, ever since people began realizing what could be processed from a pig. Perhaps you have heard the statement, “the only thing not used from a pig is his squeal!”

Now, as we all know (or have heard), lard is the best for cooking, frying and baking. Almost any old recipe will call for lard. Any new recipe will call for shortening (Crisco or any other brand).

Crisco, a popular brand first sold in 1911 by Procter & Gamble, was the first shortening to be made entirely of vegetable oil. When William Procter and James Gamble started their company, they hired chemist E. C. Kayser to develop a process to hydrogenate cottonseed oil, which ensures the shortening remains solid at normal storage temperatures. The initial purpose was to create a cheaper substance to make candles than the expensive animal fats in use at the time. Electricity began to diminish the candle market and since the product looked like lard, they began selling it as a food. This product became known as Crisco, its name derived from the initial sounds of the expression “crystallized cottonseed oil.”

You do have to be careful about buying lard at the store as it's usually partially hydrogenated which is bad news. If it's stored unrefrigerated, stay away and always check the labels.

Overall the best and smart thing to do is render it yourself, it may be a little work but it is not difficult. Depending on the size batch and method you are making for about a pound of fat, it should take anywhere from 1-2 hours.

What Is Lard? What Is Tallow?

Lard is the rendered fat from pigs. Tallow is the rendered fat from cows, sheep and bison. These fats are extremely stable. They will last a long time in the fridge. They have a high smoke point so they are wonderful for frying, even deep frying.

Soybean, corn, cottonseed and canola oil are all oils with a high smoke point. They're also very cheap to manufacture and a convenient way of using up industrial waste. Of course this is why they are so ubiquitous in our food supply. Most processed foods use these oils and restaurants use them for frying.

However, soybean, corn, cottonseed and canola oil are not good for you for a number of reasons. For one thing, they lack the fat soluble vitamins that are available in lard and tallow. They are also typically rancid even before they are used for cooking. Not to mention the fact that these oils are almost always made with genetically modified crops.

Here is what raw pig fat looks like right from the butcher....



Health Benefits of Lard & Tallow

One hundred years ago, lard and tallow were used for cooking in every American home and restaurant. They were the most commonplace cooking oils. And heart disease was unheard of. Now it's our number one killer.

It's lower in saturated fat than butter--if saturated fat bothers you. Technically lard isn't even a saturated fat; it's a monounsaturated fat. And it's one of the best dietary sources of vitamin D. It also contains no trans-fats. If there's fat to be avoided, trans-fats are the ones.

According to Sally Fallon Morell, the first recorded heart attack in America was in 1921 (Source: Local Forage). Just 10 years after Crisco (hydrogenated cottonseed oil) and 50 years after margarine (clarified vegetable fat) were introduced to the American people. Coincidence?

There are many health benefits associated with eating lard and tallow. Too many to list here. To summarize very briefly, saturated fats like lard and tallow:

- Enhance the immune system
- Build and strengthen bones and teeth (preventing cavities and osteoporosis)
- Provide energy and structural integrity to the cells
- Protect the liver
- Enhance the body's use of essential fatty acids
- Do not become rancid easily
- Do not call upon the body's reserves of antioxidants
- Do not initiate cancer
- Do not irritate the artery walls

Source: The Oiling of America

Why Render Your Own Lard & Tallow?

Maybe you've seen lard on the supermarket shelf, this is not recommended because it's partially hydrogenated, which means it's full of trans fats, which are known to cause heart disease and cancer; Which is exactly what we are trying to avoid.

To me, it's also important to use the fat from animals on pasture — that lard at the supermarket is made from animals raised in confinement. So look for fat or suet from animals that have been "grass-fed" and buy suet from pigs that have been raised humanely outdoors. See I keep thinking that if the animals are not eating well and soaking up sunshine, they're most likely not going to have those valuable fat soluble vitamins stored in their fat. Which means I won't get the health benefits that were listed above.



Finding Fat

The hardest part of making lard is finding a good source of pork fat. You're going to have to do a little digging and it's important that you not just use any pork fat you find; you want to make sure the pig was properly cared for and fed right. Your average supermarket "butcher" and I use that term loosely, isn't going to have it; that pork is all factory farmed and very few supermarket butchers cut whole carcasses any more. You may have more luck at a specialty market like Whole Foods, Wild Oats or the like, but be sure to inquire after the feeding practices.



If there is a farmer's market near you, look around and ask questions. That's how one friend stumbled onto her farmer, who is really in the goat cheese biz; he raises pigs on the leftover whey. If you don't have a farmer's market, try EatWild.com where you can find farmers with good growing practices, and not just for meat.



Storing the Lard

Air, light and moisture can make lard rancid and sour. So after it has been thoroughly cooled, cover the containers tightly and store them in a dark, cool area.

Or until the SHTF, store the lard in an airtight container in the fridge. Once cool the lard will be the texture of shortening and ranging in color from stark white to pale yellow – depending on when you stopped the rendering process. The lard can also be frozen and will last a year or more, some say indefinitely.

Methods to Render Lard

There are two basic ways to render lard: dry and wet. The dry rendering process is when you don't add any water during the rendering process and use the stove top. The wet rendering process is where you add a bit of water at the beginning to make sure it doesn't brown too much at the beginning and do this in an oven.

I have never tried the dry process but according to Kimi Harris of TheNourishingGourmet.com, she could find no difference and prefers the wet process.

Then there is the third “modern” way or second wet way to render lard via the wondrous marvel the Crock Pot. This is the method I am most familiar with. Remember that when the SHTF, if you are not making your own electricity, this method is useless.

Also, if you overcook the lard a bit, you will get a more “porky” taste and brown coloring. Good for savory dishes, roasts, soups but not so much for pies.

Basics to Rendering Lard

You will need about one pound of leaf lard (best grade for pastries) or fat back. Make sure this is not hydrogenated in any way. You can try a local farmer around slaughter time or from the store (which may have to be special ordered).

When you strain the fat, the liquid will be golden at first, but it will harden and the change to white (for lard) to a cream color (for tallow).



Equipment:

Cast iron or enamel pan or stockpot, or crockpot

Metal strainer

Coffee filter, paper towel or cheesecloth

Wide-mouth mason jars (make sure you use wide-mouth for tallow — it's hard to get the tallow out of narrow jars)

Ingredients:



Grass-fed beef, lamb, bison or pork fat — also called suet, ground (using a food processor grind or you larger chunks of fat cut up by hand but it will take longer); sometimes the farmer will sell it to you pre-ground. Cut about 1 1/2 – 2 pounds into small chunks

Water (1/2 cup per pound)

Leaf lard is the highest quality lard, perfect for baking as it doesn't have a meaty smell to it. Next in line is Fat back. Either one you use, the method is the same.

For Stovetop rendering:

Cut the lard into small pieces and place in a large pot over medium-low heat. Add about 1/2 cup water to the bottom of the pan – this will help the lard not to burn and will evaporate as the lard is rendering.

The lard will start to slowly melt.

Stir every 10 minutes to make sure nothing is sticking to the bottom of the pan.

In about 20 minutes a big portion of it will be melted. After some time (45 minutes to an hour or so) you will start to hear popping. That is the sound of the moisture leaving the cracklings and it is also a sign telling you things are moving along and you should stay close by. Stir every couple minutes.



You will also at this point start to see the “cracklings” form. At this point you will want to be careful. As moisture is released from the cracklings it will definitely sputter (like bacon). When all of the sputtering is finished and the cracklings are floating, you are technically done. Let it cook for a bit longer to get the cracklings a little more brown. This will take between 45 minutes and an hour to cook it.

If you want a flavorless lard, ideal for baking, then now is the time to drain off the fat. Line a mesh strainer with several layers of cheese cloth and strain into a bowl. The cracklings will still be pale and need to be cooked longer.

If you are going to be using your lard for savory applications or you want the finished lard to have a nutty, roasted flavor then continue to render until the cracklings are a dark golden color. Eventually they will sink to the bottom. Some people use that as the sign of when they are done but I pulled mine just before that point and ended up with a roasty lard that had a pleasant color and flavor.

Line a fine sieve with cheesecloth or a coffee filter and strain through into a jar. It will be yellowish when hot, but turn white when cooled. The cracklings will be left in the sieve and save these for other recipes.

Recap:

1. Place the pan on the stove.
2. Add the ground fat.
3. Add the water (optional).
4. Set the heat on the lowest possible setting. Cover and let cook, stirring occasionally.
5. Cook until you're left with mostly clear or golden liquid with bits of hardened stuff on top.
6. Remove from heat and strain into a mason jar through a metal strainer lined with a coffee filter, paper towel or cheesecloth.

For an alternate stove top method see <http://themilkmanswife.blogspot.com/2008/11/how-to-render-lard.html>



Oven Rendering

This takes about the same amount of time as the stovetop version. It was nice to have it contained, but everyone I talked to who used this method said they didn't watch it quite as carefully because it was out of sight.

To render lard, grind it or chop it — this is easiest when the lard is partially frozen — and put it in a 300-degree oven in a shallow casserole.

Stir it often, and cook until the lard melts and the cracklings, called chicharrones in Spanish, are floating.

Or put the cut up lard in a large pot with a lid (such as a dutch oven). Put the covered pot in a 200* oven and let it render overnight. In the morning strain your fat and have cracklings for breakfast.

For a roasted pork flavor, render the lard in a 350-degree oven until the cracklings are brown. Cook until the cracklings sink to the bottom.

Strain your rendered lard through cheesecloth or a paper coffee filter. Cool and refrigerate for up to two months or freeze.



Recap:

1. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees.
2. Place the fat into the pan.
3. Add the water (optional).
4. Cook until you're left with mostly clear or golden liquid with bits of hardened stuff on top.
5. Remove from heat and strain into a mason jar through a metal strainer lined with a coffee filter, paper towel or cheesecloth.

Crock Pot Rendering

1. Place the fat into the crockpot.
2. Add the water (optional).
3. Set the crock pot on low heat.
4. Cook until you're left with mostly clear or golden liquid with bits of hardened stuff on top.
5. Remove from heat and strain into a mason jar through a metal strainer lined with a coffee filter, paper towel or cheesecloth.



No recap as by now you should get the drift ;-}

Using it



Use it anywhere you'd use butter or shortening: To pop popcorn (the best!); to make pie crust; to fry eggs. Home-rendered lard adds wonderful flavor to baked goods like cornbread and bizcochitos and enriches refried beans.

In some cultures it's even spread on bread, topped with onions and salt, and called a sandwich.

Save the Cracklings

No matter which method you do, save the cracklings or chicharrones. Use them to enrich cornbread, burritos or tamales. You can also salt them and put them on salads or just munch on them. If you have more cracklings than you can use or eat, fed a lot of them to the chickens and used them as doggie or kitty treats.

Note:

- The by-product - cracklins or cracklings - are magnificent. If you are not familiar with them, try using them in cornbread, biscuits, bread, soup, salad topping or just salted and eaten as a snack.
- If your chosen pork fat has skin attached, know that it will produce a much more potent smell when rendering, which some find offensive.

Lard Candles

Add 1 ounce of nitric acid to eight pounds of barely melted lard. Mold just like you would wax candles. Add some beeswax if you want them to look like the usual candles.

*“The first of earthly blessings, independence.”
Edward Gibbon*

TNT

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