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## Living Homegrown Podcast – Episode 160 Curing Flavorful Meat & Preserving Protein

Show Notes are at: [www.LivingHomegrown.com/160](http://www.LivingHomegrown.com/160)

**Karen:** It is so much easier than you think it's going to be, first of all, and it is so delicious. And what I love about food preservation, and particularly in curing meat and fish and eggs, is that it's really unexpected and you get the pleasure of having built the sweat equity in the food that you're eating and serving, and then your guests feel special too. It feels like more work than just making dinner, and it's not. If you can make dinner, you can cure your own meat or smoke your own fish or pickle your own eggs.

**Theresa:** This is the Living Homegrown Podcast, episode 160.

**Announcer:** Welcome to the Living Homegrown Podcast, where it's all about how to live farm fresh, without the farm. To help guide the way to a more flavorful and sustainable lifestyle is your host, national PBS TV producer and canning expert, Theresa Loe.

**Theresa:** Hey there, everybody. Welcome to the podcast. I'm your host, Teresa Loe, and this podcast is where we talk about living farm fresh without a farm. Now, that includes organic small space food gardening and artisan food crafts like canning and fermenting. It's all about the different ways that we can live closer to our food and take small, delicious steps towards living a more sustainable lifestyle. If you'd like to learn more about any of these topics or my Farm Fresh courses or my online business coaching or my Living Homegrown membership, then just visit my website, [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com).

I have a very special treat for you today. I brought on Karen Solomon, and we are going to talk about preserving protein with gourmet flavors, so let me tell you what this is about. You know we talk a lot on this podcast about canning, fermenting, a lot of different ways that we can extend our food, extend the preservation of our food, especially if you are growing your own food and you want to save some of those flavors for later. You don't anything to go to waste. But I've never really discussed in depth how to preserve protein, meats, fish, beans, eggs, things like that, so what we're going to talk about today specifically is Karen's new book, which is *Cured Meat, Smoked Fish & Pickled Eggs: Recipes & Techniques for Preserving Protein-Packed Foods*.

And Karen is a master at explaining how to do food preservation. Karen is a food preservation teacher. She is a food writer, and she has written several cookbooks, including *Asian Pickles*, *Jam It*, *Pickle It*, *Cure It*, and *Can It, Bottle It*,

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Smoke It. And her articles and recipes have appeared in Fine Cooking, Prevention, Men's Health, Every Day with Rachael Ray, and Food52. The reason I feel like this is such a treat is that Karen helps us look at the big picture of all the different types of methods that you can go into, things that you may have never tried before. Then she's going to share a complete recipe on how you take regular beef and turn it into beef jerky that you can take on a hiking trip.

Now, the thing to remember with today's episode is that when Karen gets to sharing her recipe, it's called sour orange beef jerky, when we get to the recipe, you do not have to stop and write everything down. In fact, I didn't even have her give all of the ingredients while she was giving the recipe because we have that recipe for you in printable form, as a PDF, in the show notes for today's episode. So I want you to go there to get the recipe so you can just listen to the technique and understand the steps, but when you're ready to make it, you can go print out this recipe. To get to the recipe you go [livinghomegrown.com/160](http://livinghomegrown.com/160), and you can get everything there, including information all about Karen and all of the books that she has written, and they are all excellent.

Now, before we dive into the interview, I just want to share with you that today's podcast episode is brought to you by my Living Homegrown Institute, which is my monthly membership site where you get access to an entire library of monthly masterclasses that will help you live farm fresh without the farm. We cover everything from how to grow heirloom tomatoes and raise chickens in your backyard to making your own homemade cheese, yogurt, and fermented vegetables. Now, I believe that living an organic farm fresh lifestyle is really just a journey in learning, and as we learn different skills there are three distinct stages for our personal learning growth. We start out just being curious, we go into experimentation, and eventually we grow into mastery of these different skills.

Now, if you're looking to create a farm fresh lifestyle for yourself and you're curious where you fall on the growth learning scale, I have a free resource for you. It's my Farm Fresh Success Path that my students use inside my learning institute, and will help you decide where you are on your own learning journey, the characteristics of that stage, and some action steps and information to take you to the next level. To get to the Success Path PDF just go to [livinghomegrown.com/path](http://livinghomegrown.com/path), that's P-A-T-H, and you can download it there for free.

Okay, are you ready to learn about preserving protein-packed foods? I knew you were. Let's dive into my interview with Karen Solomon, the author of Cured Meat, Smoked Fish & Pickled Eggs. Hey, Karen. Thanks so much for coming on the show today.

Karen: Thank you so much for having me, Theresa.

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- Theresa: Well, I'm very excited about this. This is a really new topic for the podcast. I have not gone into preserving meats very much or preserving proteins. You're so experienced and have so many wonderful books out there, and I really wanted to turn my audience onto everything that you do, but when I saw this book come out I was like, "Oh, this is perfect." I had to have you on, so I'm very excited to have you here. You have several books on different ways of preserving book, but this particular one that we're talking about today is about preserving protein, and I was just curious what made you decide to dive into this one in particular.
- Karen: This was the book, Theresa, that I was looking to buy, and I couldn't find it. I mean, don't get me wrong, I love my jams, I love my pickles, I love doing and making my quick pickles and preserving stuff for shelf storage, but in the realm of protein ... I mean, I don't know if you've ever had the pleasure of canned meat, but very often it's not my most favorite thing. But I've been making my own bacon for a long time and I've also been making my own gravlax for a long time. And it just occurred to me that there's more to preserving than just the pickle, you know? There was a lot in the realm of meat and fish, and also other proteins too, yogurt and beans and nuts, that just was more meal-like than just a fabulous jar of cauliflower. And I wanted something that was just more fulfilling and that approached preserving in kind of a different mindset, like just thinking beyond the pickles, thinking beyond the cucumber.
- Theresa: Well, it definitely comes through on your book, and I totally agree with you because I have preserved my own meat, but I also grew up with a family of hunters, so we did a lot of things like beef jerky and things like that. It was always a lot of fun, but what I loved about what you did here is it's about preserving protein but with gourmet flavors. I mean, you're a foodie at heart. You understand that flavor is really what it's all about, and that's what it is for me as well, so I loved the recipes. My mouth was watering as I was reading through, and you made it not scary. I think people get nervous about preserving any kind of protein. You don't have to pressure can. There are other ways.
- Karen: Absolutely. Much simpler ways. Much, much more ancient ways. I mean, and I thank you for the compliment because that's one of my great joys in the work that I do, is I think of myself more as a demystifier than a teacher. I mean, the power of salt, you know? The power of a quick pickle. The power of a refrigerated cure. I like to present food preservation in a way that is say accessible, and also using tools and equipment that most people have in your kitchen already. You don't have to go out and buy a food dehydrator or a smoker or get into a whole hardware array in your backyard. You already have the tools that you need to make something delicious.
- Theresa: Absolutely, and you cover that so beautifully in the book. I would love to just kind of, before we dive into a recipe ... I know you're going to share with us how to do some beef jerky, a really fun beef jerky recipe, but before we dive into

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that, I'd love to just kind of walk through some of the preservation methods that you include in the book because, like you said, it kind of demystifies it so people understand that there are several different ways to do this. I know one method that you talk about in the book is dry curing. Could you just explain to someone, if they had no idea what dry curing was, what's the big picture of how that works?

Karen: Oh, sure, sure. It couldn't be more simple. It's basically your favorite protein and your friend salt. I mean, at its most basic drilled down entity that's what it is. This is your curing. The most familiar thing to people would be like salami or salumi or your dry sausages. It is taking meat that is usually seasoned, because people like the flavor of that, and then rubbing it with salt and then in cooled temperatures letting that salt get to work, which is both preserving the food, warding off any harmful microbes, and also, most importantly, pulling out the moisture from the food.

The example I always like to give is if you take a ... We're going back to cucumbers again here. If you take a cucumber and you forget about it in the back of your vegetable drawer, and you come back to it two weeks later, you have a big nasty pile of rotten food because it is the water in that cucumber that has decomposed. So when you take anything with water in it and you remove the water from it, then what is left behind is very easy to cure. So dry curing is pulling the moisture out and adding flavor, preventing the harmful growth of microbes that will spoil the food, and what is left behind is a very flavorful, a very chewy texture usually. And something that is built for the long haul, something that's going to last for a while as well.

Theresa: Yeah. The thing that really struck me about your recipes was how easy the dry curing was, because you could do it in the refrigerator in less than a week. You don't have to go out and buy some special dry curing vessel. You could use your refrigerator, which I think makes people feel safe because they know that things are in the refrigerator, but it was really simple with salts and spices and things like that, so very, very fun. I love that one. Then another type of technique that you have in the book is brine curing. Could you give us the big picture on that?

Karen: Sure, absolutely. Brine curing, very similar to dry curing, is once again the magical power of salt, but in this instance you're not just taking the dry salt and rubbing it onto your dry meat or fish or whatever it is. You're making a solution. I mean, a salt and water solution, a brine very similar to what you would make if you're used to fermenting. Then you are completely submerging that which is to be cured into the saltwater brine.

Again, just like with salt curing, I like to add a little bit of sugar, not to make it sweet, but just for balance. It just adds a little rounded savoriness to the flavor, and then of course spices, herbs, citrus, chili, garlic, like big flavors, small flavors.

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That's where you can get really, really creative in the kitchen, is whatever you are adding to that dry cure or that brine cure. But the important thing with brine curing is, of course much like with your dry curing, you keep it cool, and then also keeping it, much like pickles, you are keeping it below the brine line.

Then by the power of osmosis, the salt in that water is going to, once again, pull the moisture from the meat or the fish or whatever it is you're curing. And it's going to add flavor, it's going to ward off harmful bacteria, and it's going to give you something delicious. More often than not, that which is brine cured is usually cooked before eating, so it usually has to be either steamed or boiled or roasted, and brought up to a safe food temperature before it's consumed. Whereas with dry cures very often, once that is cured, you can just slice and eat straight away. Brine curing, you need to bring that meat or fish to temperature.

Theresa: Okay, so some of the foods that you might brine cure would be like corn beef or pastrami, right?

Karen: Yes, absolutely, corn beef, pastrami are definitely two of the big ones, two of the most famous as well as wet brined ham. I mean, the whole world of ham is the subject of many books onto itself, but a wet brined ham is also one of the most common ones people are used to.

Theresa: Okay. Now, I wanted to bring up something that you and I discussed before when we were not recording, and that is the idea of using pink salt or sodium nitrate. Now, I know a lot of my listeners might go, "Nitrates," because they're all organic and they're looking for ways of creating their meals without the nitrates that we see in the grocery store, but pink salt or sodium nitrate definitely has its place. I just wanted to bring it up because you're very careful and very strategic in your book to make sure that people had choices if they wanted to use pink nitrate or not, so first of all let's first talk about what is the purpose of pink salt or sodium nitrate.

Oh, and also this is not the same as pink Himalayan salt. Sodium nitrate is different. It just has a pink color, so we are talking about a chemical that is used in preserving, and a lot nitrates are in preserved food, processed food that's in the grocery store. It's something that we talk a lot about avoiding, but there is a purpose behind it. So what is the reason that people would want to use a pink salt?

Karen: Sure, and talking about sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate, it's a big and controversial issue, I think, amongst food preservers, and so something I always like to state is my primary purpose in what I do is about food and flavor, and I'm not a scientist and I'm not a registered dietician, so my job is to inform. But I also encourage people to do the research from trusted sources and make decisions on their own of what works for them and what works for their family.

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But first I just want to make a distinction between sodium nitrite, which is Instacure #1, and sodium nitrate, which is Instacure #2. They're both pink salt, and I know Instacure is a brand name and I keep going back to it, but it's actually two products, nitrite and nitrate.

Both of them are, it is trace elements of that chemical compound mixed with salt, and they just add the pink for no good reason other than to keep chefs in the kitchen from getting confused about the salt that they're using for curing and the salt that they're using for cooking. Then I think these have been around for decades, and then the Himalayan pink salt came about more recently and of course is very popular with fermenters and people doing food curing now. None of this was meant to intentionally be confusing. I just like that the origin was to make it not confusing, and yet it's gone the other way.

Theresa: And yet it is confusing, yes.

Karen: Exactly.

Theresa: No, but a very good explanation, so just let me recap before you dive in, and that is that Himalayan pink salt is something that we use in fermentation. The reason we use it is it has a lot of minerals. It's a regular salt that you can buy in the grocery store in the salt section or in a gourmet store. The pink salts that we're talking about for maybe doing brine curing is #1 or #2, which is either nitrate or nitrite, and that's what we're going to talk about right now, are the sodium nitrate, nitrites. Correct?

Karen: That's right.

Theresa: Okay.

Karen: That's right, exactly. Some people do not like to use sodium nitrite or nitrates. It kind of went the way of MSG, is that I would say about two decades ago a lot of research came out saying that these food stuffs were not good or healthy for people to consume. Then in more recent years some of the research has reversed that thinking, saying that these are food chemicals, much like MSG, that everyone now knows is very common in Parmesan cheese and soy sauce and tomatoes, things that have that umami flavor, that these are naturally occurring compounds in food and that they are in the very, very small trace servings that we get in food preserving, that they are indeed safe to eat. But again, please don't listen to me. By all means, do your own research. I just want to make people aware that the thinking on that has changed somewhat in the scientific community, and that they should read and do what is best for them.

Theresa: Sure.

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Karen: But I know not everybody wants to use it, and that's fine, but I do like to give people options. Also, it's not just a matter of wanting to use it or not wanting to it. It's also going to be very difficult to source, but most people, I think, have to buy it online. I know that's not even an option for a lot of people, so with all of those things in mind, I like to give people the option of use it or not use it.

Whether you're dry curing or brine curing, the purpose of using the pink salt is twofold. If it's going to be in the refrigerator for more than a week, you definitely want to use it to help ward off any harmful microbes that can form, but also, and this is more ... again, I also say I'm a food person first. It's an aesthetic value as well, particularly in something like a wet brined ham. If you don't use the pink curing salt, your ham is not going to be a very appetizing color. It will taste fine, but it's going to be a sort of unseeingly shade of gray, whereas if you use the pink salt, it's going to be a beautiful pink that you're going to be proud to serve in the center of your table. Some people are fine with that. Some people don't mind how their food looks, and as long as it tastes good they're happy, but if it's over a week I would definitely recommend that extra level of preservation.

Under a week, though, that is your call and it's up to you. It's something like bacon. Yes, it looks more lovely when you have it secure in there. It's going to be a more beautiful shade when you slice it, but of course, if you're going to fry it, you're going to be searing it on both sides and the color won't be so important. But with something like a corn beef or a ham, like a big cut of meat that you're going to be cutting into, you might want to think about the aesthetics of that and know that it's going to look better if you use that.

Theresa: I love this, yes. I'm really glad we just hit this head on, because it's a question that people, they have a question on it, but they're just unsure, so what you were very careful to do in the book was you gave people options for curing, any kind of curing of meat that you could do in less than a week so that they did not need, for safety purposes, they did not need the pink salt. You go into it in much more detail in the recipes, like where you need to use it and where you don't. We don't need to go into all of that, but I definitely wanted to touch on it because it's a really common question. Like, if you want to do ham and you want to do brine curing, then that's what you're going to need to use if you want that pink color, so perfect. I just wanted to hit on that, so thanks for explaining it.

Karen: Great.

Theresa: Great explanation. I love that. Okay, so there's another method that you talk about in the book, and that is about smoking. You talk about hot versus cold smoking, so I just wanted to touch on what that is. So if someone is wondering if

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you cover that in the book, you do. So what's the difference between hot and cold smoking?

Karen: Sure, sure. Well, I think the biggest difference I want to mention right off the bat is hot smoking is fabulous, and if you have a grill at home, whether it be a charcoal grill or a gas grill, you have everything you need to make that happen. In fact, the book even contains a very short note on how you can fake smoke something in your oven, but we can get back to that in a moment.

Theresa: Okay.

Karen: And hot smoking is wonderful. It's just that delicious barbecue flavor, and that's something that is highly accessible and I definitely recommend to anyone who likes great food. Cold smoking is included in there and I do talk about it, but I have to say I don't actually recommend it for most home cooks. Here's why. The food unsafety zone ... everyone who's ever worked in a restaurant or a kitchen, a cafeteria, you are trained that food that is held for two hours or longer between 40 degrees and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, that is considered an unsafe temperature for an unsafe period of time.

Hot smoking is 140 degrees or above, and cold smoking usually maxes out beneath that, so anywhere between 85 and 120, kind of on the zone of right there when you're hitting 140 degrees. So it's at a lower temperature, at a food unsafe temperature for hours and hours and hours, so depending on the size of the thing that you are smoking ... if it's a little tiny fish, maybe that just takes a few hours. If it's a large hunk of meat, that can take nine or 12 hours. So in short, I definitely recommend hot smoking. I'm not a big fan of recommending cold smoking for home use.

Some of the other differences are that for hot smoking, as I mentioned, you probably have the tools that are required for that, a charcoal grill, a gas grill. I really like to use hickory sawdust to create that smoke flavor, and it's just a really nice product for smoldering. If you really love using your wood chips, by all means, continue to use your wood chips. I like the convenience of the sawdust because you don't have to soak it ahead of time. You just kind of make a little foil pack of it and you put it on top of some hot coals. The cold smoking requires some special equipment. You need backyard space, which hopefully many of your listeners have. I wish I had a lot more in my house, but I don't.

In hot smoking you have your heat source and then you have your food fairly close to the heat source, so again we're talking about a hot side of the grill and a cold side of the grill. In cold smoking you have your heat source and then very far away from that you have your food, so the most popular backyard setup for cold smoking is you have a fire that is built and then tubes that connect from ... that collect the smoke from the fire, that travel underground where they are

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cooled, and then travel for several yards until you get to the meat, which is hanging in an airtight box. So usually it's a fire, tubes that are underground, and then an unplugged refrigerator fitted with hanging racks, which is where you hang your meat, in which the smoke collects.

Theresa: Yeah, so it's definitely, it's a much bigger operation if you wanted to do the cold smoking, and I'm with you. You really have to kind of know what you're doing because of the temperatures that you're working with.

Karen: You do have to really know what you're doing, and the quandary that I always face when writing about and talking about food preservation is when you think about how people have been saving their food for centuries, for thousands of years, for a millennium ... right? They have been using many, many techniques that are considered unsafe by today's standards. So again this is where I like to inform people and allow them to make decisions that work for them and the people that they feed. Have people been cold smoking for since the beginning of food preservation? Most definitely, but when you look at National Center for Home Food Preservation, when you look at USDA recommendations, when you look at modern standards of food safety ... which also, I should say, vary from country to country. I don't know if you've talked about this before on the show, but some European canning practices would just make ...

Theresa: Yes.

Karen: Yes, would just make people's heads spin here.

Theresa: Yes.

Karen: I mean, it's just sort of baffling to think about. Again, I'm not a scientist. I have not independently verified the safety or lack of safety in some of this information, so I like for people to do the research and decide. So if you are going to cold smoke at home and you do have that amazing ability to set up that hardware and make that happen, I definitely recommend bringing animal protein to a safe temperature before you consume it. So what is it? I think it's 140 for fish, 150 for pork, 160 for poultry, if I'm not mistaken, and that's all degrees Fahrenheit. But then of course, that's going to change the texture of that which has been cold smoked.

Theresa: Correct, because it's already been through a process. Let's talk a little bit about the hot smoking just because I think that's such an easy thing for people to do, and like you said, you're using heat, you're over 140 degrees or higher, and you can use your barbecue. I love the idea of using hickory sawdust, because you don't have to soak it. That's just awesome and it's something that you can pick up. I have seen that at like the home centers where you would buy lumber or where you would buy barbecue. They carry those in the barbecue section, so it's

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a fairly easy thing to get that flavor, that smoky flavor, but you're actually cooking the food at the same time. Is that the deal?

Karen: You are cooking the food, but usually before your hot smoking you have cured that food in some manner as well, so you've either given it a short dry cure ... Again, to pull out moisture. It kind of gives it a firmer texture. I keep coming back to fish because I think that that's the most common thing that people come to for hot smoking and for cold smoking. I mean, people do meat as well, of course, but particularly in fish it's very pronounced. Think about the difference between a very firm and flaky hot smoked fish versus like a gravlax, which is very, almost ... I hate to use the word gelatinous, because that has really bad connotations for a lot of people's palate, but a very ... let's call it a silkier texture than a smokier, firmer texture.

It is a low and slow cooking. 140 is a pretty low temperature. If you were just cooking fish for dinner and you did it at 140, it's going to take a couple, three hours. It's going to take two to three hours to cook, I figure, one to maybe two-inch thick piece of fish, so it's going to take some time.

Theresa: Sure.

Karen: So it's a low and slow cook, and it gives that smoke plenty of time to get in there and penetrate, and much like the salt or sugar or whatever it is that you have put onto your fish or meat that you're going to hot smoke, the smoke itself is a preserving agent too. In ancient times, of course people would hang the meat over the fire or hang the fish over the fire, so it's not just the salt that's curing, but the smoke is curing it as well and, of course, adding that delicious flavor.

Theresa: Yes. Speaking of the flavor, I just had to touch on, because you'd hinted to it, the fake smoking, so you have to tell everybody. What is the trick for doing fake smoking?

Karen: The fake smoking so, I mean, there are stove top smokers, of course, and there's also those little smoking guns, which if you're into gadgetry and if you're into storing extra kitchen appliances, by all means, go forth and fake smoke. But the easiest one by far ... and again I always come back to, "Okay, what do you already have? What are the tools that are already in your kitchen that you can work with now?" You take your fish or your cured bacon or whatever it is, and you put it on a rack over a baking sheet, and then you brush on the thinnest, thinnest layer of a very high-quality liquid smoke.

And you cannot skimp here. Don't just buy imitation liquid smoke because it's awful. The flavor is terrible. It's really bad, so you want to look at that ingredient label and you want to see nothing on that label other than hickory smoke, and if you buy the good stuff ... And in truth, it's not even that much more expensive

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than the bad stuff, so I'm not even sure why they sell those. But if you buy the good stuff, I mean, you literally brush on maybe an eighth of a teaspoon. I mean, you just need the tiniest, tiniest hint of it, and then you put it in a rack in the oven low and slow. And it takes about the same period of time, so whatever the lowest temperature on your oven can go. Some ovens get as low as 150. Many are about 170. But whatever it is, the lowest temperature that you can and just let that smoke flavor penetrate, and then you get that same texture of the meat or fish as it cooks really, really slowly.

Of course, it doesn't have the curing properties that real smoke would have, but you do get that good flavor and, in truth, none of the recipes in my book are for pounds and pounds of anything at once. I mean, they can certainly be scaled, but most things are somewhere around two pounds, somewhere between one to two pounds, which is definitely consumable within a week for two to four people, so I want you to enjoy it. Everything freezes really well too if you want to go big and then keep eating for months at a time. Most of the recipes in here freeze well too.

Theresa: Fantastic. Yeah, so I'm glad you touched on that. It sounds like such an easy way to some that smoky flavor, and definitely there's a difference between the junky stuff and the good stuff on the smoke, fake smoke, so, fantastic. Okay, let's talk a little bit about drying or even dehydrating meat. You're going to be sharing with us how to make a beef jerky, which is drying the meat. I think people automatically think, "Well, you have to have a dehydrator, and I have to go out and get all this special equipment," and you don't. You can use your oven. For the longest time I did this with my oven, and definitely there's pros and cons to both, having a dehydrator or not, but using an oven is a great way to go and you talk about that in the book.

Karen: Oh, definitely, definitely. Again, I consider myself a demystifier above all. I love that moment of, "What? I can just make that with what I have?" Yes, I love. I teach a lot classes and that's always the very rewarding thing for me, is for people to realize that they have all of the tools that they need to accomplish their kitchen preservation goals, and I love that. Yes, having a food dehydrators has its pros and cons. These days they have come down in price quite bit. Is it okay to mention brand names?

Theresa: Oh, yeah. Absolutely, yeah. I have an Excalibur, is what I have.

Karen: Yes. I was going to say the Excalibur for many, many years was the king of the food dehydrators. They are large, they are well-built, they're great machines, but they tend to be a couple of hundred dollars.

Theresa: And they're big. They take up a lot of space.

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- Karen: And they're big.
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Karen: They're all big, though. I mean, in truth, really that is the biggest drawback of the food dehydrator, is all of those days when you are not dehydrating meat or tomatoes, you have to store it. I live in an apartment, so it's definitely an issue. I mean, that next to the pressure canner. Yeah, it takes up a lot of room. The cost has come, but definitely the size of it and storing your food dehydrator are the biggest drawbacks. I have a Nesco, and I believe that was under \$100.
- Theresa: Oh, good.
- Karen: But you don't have to start there. I mean, if you want to figure out if drying meat, or fish or whatever it is, is for you, your oven is fabulous. You already have it and it's ready to work for you, and if you have a convection oven, even better because that nice convection air dries things out even more quickly. Should we get into ...
- Theresa: Yeah.
- Karen: ... the recipe in general or just drying?
- Theresa: Yeah. No, no. Let's just dive into the recipe, because what really intrigued me about this particular recipe ... you're going to share with us how to do sour orange beef jerky, and I loved it because it's not the typical teriyaki beef jerky, which is something I've probably made a billion times, so this one really intrigued me, and so I'd love for you to share the recipe on that.
- Karen: I'm so glad that you picked the sour orange beef jerky, because I really love that, and also there's a miso yogurt beef jerky in here too, which is just ...
- Theresa: I saw that, yes.
- Karen: Again, I love those flavors in there, and there's nothing wrong with your basic soy sauce, Worcestershire, molasses, garlic. I mean, that basic beef jerky, that basic teriyaki style is just pure nostalgia. It's just pure road trip nostalgia for me, you know?
- Theresa: Yes.
- Karen: I love that, and that's has its place and that is definitely in there as well, but yes, why not elevate beef jerky to include modern delicious, just big banging flavors? And this is definitely one of them. The sour orange is really nice. It's almost like a Cuban mojo flavor, like it's just very citrus-y, very acidic. I love acid. And then

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mixed with some cumin, it just makes it really earthy and fragrant. It's really nice. A lot of people go big on garlic in their beef jerky and that definitely has its place, but I really wanted to do one without that, and so instead of garlic this gets its pungency from some sliced red onion, which is just again, just a little bit lighter, just a little bit more multidimensional than that great road trip teriyaki jerky that you and I love.

Theresa: Yes, yes.

Karen: But starting with the meat, you want to go with a really lean cut, so when you're drying beef especially, or any kind of meat, the meat can be dried, the fat just gets rancid, so you want to start with something that's really lean and trim away any fat. I love a top sirloin, a flank steak. You know, something with some nice texture to it that's a really lean cut. Then in any kind of jerky making you're either going to rub on a dry cure, and the meat is going to tenderize and get its flavor and pull out some of its moisture that way, or you're going to marinate it in some kind of wet brine cure.

So sometimes that can be a water salt solution, say that's a soy sauce solution, but all of these are accomplishing the same thing. Adding the flavor, in this case making the meat more tender and delicious, and pulling out some of the moisture from the meat to kind of give it a head start so that when you're turning on the electricity of the oven or the food dehydrator or whatever you're going to use to dry the meat, it already has something of a jump start on getting some of that moisture out.

Theresa: Got it.

Karen: Then what I like to do ... and you don't have to. If you didn't plan for it, it's fine, but I like to freeze meat for 20, 30 minutes just to get it super cold, because if it's really, really cold, it's much easier to slice.

Theresa: Ah.

Karen: Yeah. It's just a little ... and again, if you forget, it's okay. If your jerky is a little thicker, it's okay. It's just going to take longer to dry, but if you want it to dry quickly and you like, just your personal preference is that thinner cut, then definitely freeze it for a little bit. And if you're not already sharpening your knives in your home kitchen, you really should be. Cooking is just ... I don't know. Theresa, I feel like cooking is so much better when you're doing with the right tools for the right job, right? And so-

Theresa: And it's safer.

Karen: Yes.

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Theresa: It's safer too, because the reason people cut themselves is because their knife is dull and it slips, but if you have a very, very, very sharp knife you are actually less likely to cut yourself, because you're in complete control.

Karen: 100%.

Theresa: Yeah.

Karen: Absolutely. In my kitchen I always say, "Safety third." But no, safety first, and cooking is just more pleasurable and your food will look better. For years and years I just thought, "Oh, I don't make very attractive food." And still I would not say I'm a food stylist, but it is really amazing how when you're using the right knife for the right job, a good sharp knife, that your food looks better, you know?

Theresa: Yes.

Karen: So that's just something to consider as well, but by all means, if you do sharpen your knives, and you should, for a recipe like beef jerky definitely give yourself a good fresh sharpening because getting those nice thin slices is only going to happen with a really sharp knife. Then you have a couple of options, and again this comes back to personal preference. If you want your jerky to be a little bit chewier, if you like it on the chewy side, then you are going to slice with the grain. If you want it to be more tender, more toothsome, then you're going to slice it against the grain.

Theresa: Great. Yes.

Karen: This depends on your cut. It just depends on your preference, but you're welcome to go on either direction. Do a little half and half, maybe, for your first batch to see where you like it to go.

Theresa: Sure.

Karen: But your meat is cold. You've sliced it thin in the direction you like, and then it's either in a dry cure or a wet cure. In this recipe specifically for the sour orange beef jerky, I would call it a moist cure, to be honest. It's kind of somewhere in between, because it's got the orange juice, it's got the lemon juice, and then it has a good healthy dose of cumin, which kind of soaks up some of the liquid. So it's somewhere in between, but it's definitely marinating, taking on its flavor, getting more tender. Then you let it sit for a little while, and then eventually you're going to pull it out of that cure, and then you are going to lay it in a thin even layer.

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So if you're laying it on the rack of your food dehydrator, you're going to lay your meat out in an even layer with lots of space in between. You want there to be air flow in between each piece of the jerky, so you want there to be lots of flow, lots of air current in between every piece. And same thing if you're oven drying it. You're going to do my favorite method, which is I usually use a cooling rack over a baking sheet, because this way if any fat is to drip below, then the baking sheet will catch it. Some people who have oven racks that are a lot cleaner than mine, they just simply drape each piece of meat over the oven rack, and you can do that. I would definitely recommend a little, just a light oiling maybe on your clean oven rack as well, but whatever feels right to you, and then low, slow, and air flow. That's basically the gist of it all.

You want a low temperature with lots of circulating air, so if you have a food dehydrator that has the fan built in, that's just going to give you that nice low temperature. I think most of them max out at 160. That's the highest temperature. Many of them go down to, I think ... I can't remember if it's 80 or 90 degrees, but for meat, usually you want it at its highest temperature, so somewhere between 150 and 160 is usually recommended for protein. And the lower temperatures on a food dehydrator are saved for things like herbs or fruits, things that need things a little more gently, more of a gentle temperature. But in the oven, again, you want to take it down as slow as it'll go, so however. If your oven goes to 150, that's great; 170, that will definitely work too.

And then if you have a convection oven, by all means, use it because that circulatory airflow is going to be the friend of your jerky and it's going to dry it out much more quickly than if you don't have a convection oven. If you have a standard oven, I recommend putting like a wooden spoon or something in the door of the oven to have it ajar, and then that creates a lot better air flow in your house. Even on a summer's day, it doesn't heat up the kitchen too much. It's not like having the oven on to make a roast.

Theresa: No. Right, right, because you're doing it so low. I love the technical of doing the wooden spoon. That's actually how I used to do it when I used to ... Yeah, I used a wooden spoon. It works great. This is excellent. I also wanted just to mention that no one has to try and write everything down because we do have the recipe for everybody in the show notes, which will make it really easy and they can just print it out. What they're doing at this point is they have everything laid out very evenly so that it's not touching. There's air flow all the way around. Then about how long does it take for things to dry out? I guess it really depends on how thin you slice it.

Karen: That's right, and of course the thinner the slice ... right? The more quickly it's going to dry. I have noticed too it depends on the humidity in the air as well. You know, how hard does your oven or food dehydrator have to fight with the air, with just the general moisture in the air, but it takes several hours. And it's a

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big window and it depends on the size of the batch, it depends on the humidity, it depends on the thickness of the meat, it depends how wet the meat when it went into the food dehydrator or into your oven. So I know this is a really annoying range, but it's kind of like when the repairman says, "I'll be at your house between 12:00 and 6:00." Right? You're like, "Can you please be more specific?" But I feel comfortable saying three to eight hours, but I think right in the middle there, like about five hours, tends to be the sweet spot, but I want to give people that range because I don't want you to be-

Theresa: Right, so they understand. Yes.

Karen: Yes, don't be late for your camping trip because you're waiting for the jerky, you know?

Theresa: Right, right. And you have a trick for knowing when it's ready. How do we know when it's ready?

Karen: Sure. After about three hours, because it is possible on a dry day, if you've sliced it super thin, definitely start checking at that point, but the easiest thing to do is just rip open a piece of jerky and look on the inside, and you can see. It's kind of like if you've ever made your own pasta and you just kind of break open a noodle and you look inside, and you can see where it's raw and you can see where it's cooked and you can see if the cooked part has gone all the way through. It's very much the same with jerky. You rip it part and you can tell, when you are looking at it and how it rips. Is there raw meat in the middle? Then it's not done yet. Then you have to leave it in there for a little while.

Sometimes, if it becomes really dry and you just kind of bend it and it breaks, then it is definitely done, but I like to catch it, if you can, a little bit before that. You want it to be dried all the way through, but not super brittle. I don't know. That's always my thing. It's like when chocolate chip cookies are crispy on the outside and still chewy in the middle. It's kind of like that. You want it to be dried all the way through, but not so dry that it's brittle, but ripping it open and looking in the interior is definitely your best method for checking for done-ness.

When your jerky is still warm, we talked about that you start with a lean cut and we talked about that you trim away all the fat you possibly can, but when it's still warm sometimes the fat is beating on the top right when it comes out of the oven or the food dehydrator. And you want to wipe that away. You kind of blot it with some towels because that's going to just prolong the storage of the meat as well. But once it's completely cool, I usually wrap mine in wax paper or put it in a zip top bag, and then yes, at that point you can throw it in your backpack and it will last.

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I mean, it will definitely last for several days, a week, even more, at room temperature, if it is truly dry and free of its fat, but just to be on the safe side, just because why not? You already have it. I recommend always recommend keeping it in the refrigerator, because it's just that extra level of assurance and knowing that it is at a safe temperature as well as a safe room temperature. The refrigerator is a great way to store your jerky long-term. In fact, even the freezer. If you have it wrapped tightly, it will keep in the freezer for months and months and months. Like you were saying, you grew up in a hunting family.

Theresa: Yes.

Karen: If you have that kind of meat to work with, like a very serious batch of meat to process, knowing that you can save some of it long-term, for the really long-term, this is a great way to do it, of course.

Theresa: Yes, absolutely. You had a little trick in there where you could take rice and put it in like a cloth teabag.

Karen: Oh, yeah. Yes. Yes, of course.

Theresa: I thought, "Oh, what a great idea." So you put rice in a cloth teabag and you can put that in with the Ziploc bag, and it will absorb any residual moisture that might be in there.

Karen: Thank you for remind me. Yes, like the trick that people do in their saltshaker, right?

Theresa: Yes.

Karen: That's, I think, where I first saw it or read about it, and I should emphasize it's raw rice, so it's uncooked rice that you take and you tie up in a little piece of butter muslin or a teabag or something, and that will help. You know those little desiccant sacks?

Theresa: Yes.

Karen: That you see in little packages of seaweed or in packages of beef jerky. This is just a little homemade version of that, just a little raw rice sachet to help absorb any ambient moisture in the bag.

Theresa: Yeah, fantastic. Since I had brought it up, I wanted to also say that you talk about, in the book, in the beginning of the book, if you are a hunter and you have wild game, you do have to do some special processing with your meat just to be on the safe side if you were going to do something like beef jerky. I think you say to freeze it for 30 days. That's what's recommended by the USDA in

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order to make sure that any parasites that might be in that wild game are taken care of, so if anyone is interested in using wild game, you do talk about what to do first before you do any of the other processing.

- Karen: If you are hunting your own, this is what is recommended by the National Center for Food Preservation and also the USDA, and not just freezing it for 30 days, Theresa, but freezing it at zero degrees.
- Theresa: Right. That's right, which is not-
- Karen: So colder than your home freezer. Right.
- Theresa: Yes, I was just going to say that's not a standard freezer. It's a subzero. You need a subzero freezer.
- Karen: That's right.
- Theresa: Yes.
- Karen: Yes, that's it. That's exactly it, and so that is mostly the recommendations so that your meat is completely safe and it kills off any parasites that are not responsive to just a regular home freezer, so thank you for bringing that up.
- Theresa: Yeah. Well, I had been the one to bring up hunting and then I thought, "We probably should say something," because you did make a statement in the book on that, and I thought it was such a great bit of information. And since I had mentioned it, I thought, "Well, we should definitely make sure everyone knows." Yeah, fantastic. Well, this was-
- Karen: Can I ask you, Theresa ...
- Theresa: Sure.
- Karen: Did your family do that?
- Theresa: No, we didn't and no one died, but-
- Karen: Okay.
- Theresa: When I read that, and I actually had heard that later because I'm a master food preserver, so I had heard that, but no, we made venison jerky in the oven for years and years, and venison is a very lean cut of meat, so it worked very well. We tenderized it by doing teriyaki venison jerky. Plus, venison meat is a little gamey so having it soak in teriyaki marinade would help with that and help with the tenderizing, but definitely we made jerky all the time for years and years

and no, we never got sick. But that just probably means we just didn't have any parasites in the deer that we had.

Karen: Right. I ask, and I hope you don't mind my probing.

Theresa: No.

Karen: Because again, this is a perfect instance where this is the government recommendation, and I have yet to meet a hunter who has done that.

Theresa: Right.

Karen: I mean, I'm sure they exist out there.

Theresa: Sure.

Karen: But I just think it's interesting. Again, it just goes back to, these are all food preservation techniques that have been used for years and years and years, and there's the recommendations and then there's what people do.

Theresa: Sure.

Karen: So I just like to call out the balance of the two.

Theresa: Right, absolutely, but if you are in an area where you know that having parasites in the game meat is a possibility, then you definitely want to do that.

Karen: Absolutely. Please do.

Theresa: It's an important thing to bring up, for most of the deer meat what we did in the last few years was we always made sausage out of the meat, and so we had a local butcher who would then process. You know, we had roasts and things. We would make stews and things like that with some of the meat, but we also processed a lot of it as summer sausage, breakfast sausage, and absolutely delicious when we had to add fat in, because it was so lean, but absolutely delicious. We could make it spicy or not spicy, or herby or whatever, and we could get very, very gourmet with our venison, so absolutely there's different ways to process game meat. But I did want to bring it up, since I had mentioned it, so everyone knows.

Karen: Great. I'm glad you did. Thank you.

Theresa: Yeah, sure. Well, I'd like to thank you. This was awesome. I just love this conversation. I'm so excited about this book and I'm so excited to share it with everybody, so I just wanted to thank you so much for coming on. Just in closing,

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what would you like to say to someone who maybe has never tried this before? What would you like to say to encourage them to giving preservation of protein a try?

Karen: Oh my goodness. What are you waiting for? It is so much easier than you think it's going to be, first of all, and it is so delicious. And what I love about food preservation in general ... I always say, if you want to know, if you want ideas about what's for dinner, don't ask me. Don't come to my books because I have no idea. I don't write those things. What I love about food preservation, and particularly in curing meat and fish and eggs and beans and nuts and making your own dairy, cheese and yogurt, is that it's really unexpected, is that people don't ... You know, when you go to someone's house for dinner they expect that you're going to cook a chicken and some side dishes for them, right?

But when you come to someone's house for brunch and you pull out the gravlax that you've made yourself and the cream cheese that you've made yourself and the bread you've baked yourself, when you go to the staples of the kitchen and you have crafted those on your own, it's a wonderful surprise. And you get the pleasure of having built the sweat equity in the food that you're eating and serving, and then your guests feel special too that you went through this. It feels like more trouble, it feels like more work than just making dinner, and it's not. If you can make dinner, you can cure your own meat or smoke your own fish or pickle your own eggs.

Theresa: Love it. That is so awesome. Well, thank you. Thank you so much, Karen.

Karen: Thank you. This was great. Thank you for having me.

Theresa: Well, I hope you enjoyed that interview with Karen Solomon, the author of *Cured Meat, Smoked Fish & Pickled Eggs*. We didn't even really get into smoked fish or pickled eggs. We only got into cured meat, so as you can see there's a lot more to learn, and Karen is just a wealth of information. If you'd like to learn more about Karen and get a copy of the recipe that she just shared on making beef jerky, then just go to the show notes for today's episode, and you can get that at [livinghomegrown.com/160](http://livinghomegrown.com/160). Everything will be right there, including the PDF recipe printout for sour orange beef jerky.

As a reminder, today's podcast episode was brought to you by my Living Homegrown membership, and if you'd like a free PDF Success Path that my students use inside my membership, then just go to [livinghomegrown.com/path](http://livinghomegrown.com/path) and you can get it there for free.

I really, really loved this episode. I thought it was really fun to talk about some different preservation methods that I don't usually cover here on the podcast, and there's so much more to learn, so I hope you'll dip your toe into doing



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preservation of proteins. She covers a lot more in the book. We only scratched the surface. That's it for today's episode, and until next time, just try to live a little more local, seasonal, and homegrown. Take care.

Announcer: That's all for this episode of the Living Homegrown Podcast. Visit [livinghomegrown.com](http://livinghomegrown.com) to download Theresa's free canning resource guide, and find more tips on how to live farm fresh without the farm. Be sure to join Theresa Loe next time on the Living Homegrown podcast.