**Home-Made Corned Beef and Pastrami**

Sunday, March 16, 2014

Happy St. Patricks Day!

I think we all know by now that there is absolutely nothing Irish about corned beef.  Corned beef is much more Jewish/German than anything else, but since we all seem to love it this time of year, I thought it might be time to post how easy it is to make your own corned beef.  I use Alton Brown's excellent recipe as a guide for mine.

First things first.  The word " corned" actually means to be cured in a salty brine.  It is an ancient method of preserving meat for long periods of time.  Making your own corned beef requires at least a two week time investment, but the actual work can be completed in under an hour.  You must use Pink Salt or Prague Powder in the curing process or you risk contamination of the meat and you will never achieve that glorious red color of the final product.

And since we are making the commitment to brining our own beef, we might as well go the extra step and make pastrami.  Pastrami is nothing more than smoked corned beef.

So on this St. Patrick's Day I present to you two decidedly non Irish foods: Corned Beef and Pastrami. Either of them makes for an unforgettable Reuben sandwich. Na Zdravi!

Corned Beef

1, 5-6 lb beef brisket, cut in half

For the Brine:

1 cup kosher salt

1/2 cup brown sugar

2 Tbsp pink salt (also known as Prague Powder or Salt Peter)

2 cinnamon sticks broken in to large pieces

1 tsp mustard seed

8 whole cloves

1 tsp ground allspice

12 juniper berries

2 bay leaves, crumbled

1/2 tsp ground dried ginger

2 quarts water

2 lbs ice cubes

In a large pot combine salt, sugar, spices.  Add 2 quarts water and bring to a boil.  Remove from heat.  Add 2 lbs ice cubes and stir until brine is cooled and ice is melted.

Place each half of the beef brisket in a large, seal-able plastic bag.  Evenly distribute the brine and spices between the two bags.  Remove all air and seal the bags.  Refrigerate at least 14 days, rotating bags occasionally, before cooking.

To cook Corned Beef:

3 quarts water

1 tsp kosher salt

1 Tbsp cracked black pepper

1 tsp ground allspice

2 bay leaves

1 cup chopped carrots

1 cup chopped onion

1 cup chopped celery

optional  1 cabbage (I prefer Savoy cabbage) , cored and chopped

optional  1 lb. small new potatoes

Remove corned beef from brine and rinse briefly to remove any seasoning clinging to the beef.  Place beef in a large heavy metal pot and cover with 3 quarts of water.  Add salt, pepper, allspice, bay leaves, carrots, onion and celery.  Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium low and cover with a lid.  Simmer for 3 hours.

Add Cabbage and potatoes (if using) and cook over medium heat, until cabbage and potatoes are tender (about 30-45 minutes).

Remove Beef from pot and place on cutting board.  Cut into slices across the grain.  Serve with cabbage and other cooked vegetables and broth.

Pastrami:

2- 3 Tbsp cracked black pepper

Apple wood chips

Remove Corned Beef from brine and rinse briefly to remove any seasoning clinging to the beef.  Gently pat beef dry with paper toweling, then place on a baking sheet and coat with black pepper. pressing into all sides of the beef.

Prepare charcoal smoker.  Smoke for 6 hours over apple wood chips until black.

Remove meat from smoker and place in a 9x13 glass baking pan.  add 1 cup water, cover tightly with foil and bake for an additional 6 hours at 200 F.  Cool completely before slicing.