

TOP rashers TESTED

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Bacon in the kitchen

Roz Crowley

It's hard to resist a rasher. Part of our national cuisine, a good rasher is packed with flavour and delivers a satisfying chew.

This week I have looked at loin rashers some smoked, some green, seeking the best taste and those which lost the least liquid in the pan.

When too much liquid oozes the rasher boils instead of frying with no crisping of the fat.

Bacon is cured with salt and preserved with nitrites and nitrates – E249 and E250 (also known as saltpetre) which help reduce the danger of clostridium botulinum, the bacterium which causes the muscle paralysing condition, botulism.

Moderation is always advised, especially as these preservatives are used in many other convenience products. As salt content is high, they are best avoided when trying to fight off colds and other viruses. Salty foods retain fluids that are best flushed through the system.

Dry curing is done by rubbing salt into the bacon joint and leaving it for up to 10 days when the salt draws out the moisture and causes it to lose up to

30% of its weight, adding to the cost of production.

Wet curing can involve soaking in a solution of salt and water or injecting it into the meat along with phosphates, nitrites and nitrates to help retain fluid and keep weight up. Sometimes bacon that is labelled dry cured is rubbed with salt and left in the puddle of water that oozes from the meat and is eventually resorbed into the meat.

This is one reason why some rashers, though dry cured, still produce liquid in the frying pan and some extra suds.

Many bacon joints are frozen to make them easier to slice. And, in response to what they see as consumer demand, many producers slice the frozen joints thinly to provide more rashers in the pack.

When the water melts we get far more liquid than we expect in the pan, or in the packet. The white frothy solids that can appear during cooking are mainly the natural proteins in the meat leaking out when heated, and are not to be worried about, though they are unpleasant and can burn in the pan. I mop them up with kitchen tissue whenever I see them. ■■



Rosscarbery Recipes dry cure loin rashers, 176g, €4.36 (€24.75/kg)

These were the best rashers for crisping up. There was no loss of liquid at all, due to the dry curing. With 98% West Cork pork loin, the flavour was of delicious pork and was not over salted, perhaps due to the addition of a little sugar with the salt which is 2.5% before natural shrinkage. The favourite of tasters, but a little pricey for some. See caherbegfreerangepork.ie for shops.

Score: 9

Stephen's Bacon English Market, Cork, 238g, €2.38 (€10/kg)

Supplied by Tom Bradley of Cork Bacon Curers who sources 90% of his meat in Ireland, the remainder in France when necessary. This bacon is not frozen at any stage and is sliced freshly by Stephen every day. The result is a well balanced, natural-tasting rasher which didn't leach much water in the pan. A decent rasher, sold loose. Salt 2.8%. Fair price.

Score: 8.75



Rudds premium dry cure rashers, 240g, €3.99 (€16.62/kg)

With 98% pork (Irish), 2.5% salt, sugar and spices, tasters liked this rasher which had no suds and crisped up nicely. A good, old-fashioned rasher.

Score: 7.5



Denny thick cut rashers, 300g €4.99, (€16.63)

Thick cut, these rashers were quite substantial with very little suds or liquid in the pan. At 2.5% salt, the taste was over salty. Expensive for this quality. Made from Irish pork.

Score 6.75



Marks and Spencer back rashers, 250g, €3.59 (€14.36/kg)

88% pork content leaves a lot of room for water and additives, but there was just a little water and suds oozing in the pan. 2.5% salt is average and the rasher had a slightly sweet taste and a meatiness liked by tasters. Very thinly cut, but cooking firmed it up a bit. Produced in Northern Ireland from Irish pork.

Score: 7



Lidl Deluxe Irish unsmoked dry cure rashers, 250g, €2.49 (€9.86/kg)

IE513 on the pack refers to Oakpark Foods in Cahir which sources its meat mainly in Munster, but also in other counties. A decent 97% pork has a low 1.7% salt, but tasted quite salty. Lots of liquid and suds came out in the pan.

Score: 6



Galtee thick cut rashers, 250g, €4.49 (€17.96/kg)

Lots of white suds and some liquid came into the pan and burned easily before the bacon crisped up. 92% pork means some water in the meat, though the texture was fine. Added dextrose explains the slightly sweet flavour which most tasters didn't like. With 2.7% salt, Irish pork is used. Price high for this quality.

Score: 6



Aldi - Brannan's smoked Irish back rashers, 390g, €1.99 (€5.10/kg)

The source of meat products can be found by using the number given on the pack. In this case IE528 refers to Callan Bacon, Kilkenny, which uses Irish pork. 3.25% salt is high and gives the bacon an over saltiness that tasters thought much too much. 92% pork in these very thin rashers means quite a lot of water is left and some leached from the rashers with lots of suds.

Score: 5