

# USEFUL FOOD SMOKING TIPS

For hot food smokers including the ProQ range



## Food smoking explained

Food smoking is a process of infusing food with wood smoke flavours within a confined space - hence the requirement for a lid. The ProQ food smoker hot smokes food by cooking and flavouring the food. The water pan means that you are in addition able to 'water smoke' whereby food is cooked more slowly, is still flavoured with wood smoke but is much more succulent. The ProQ smoker is designed to operate at temperatures akin to your oven in a range between 150°C and 200°C but with the added flavour from putting wood chunks, chips or pellets onto the charcoal fire. With the buffer created by the water pan and the resultant steam production, food will take about 2 to 3 times longer to cook in your smoker than in a conventional oven. The result is tender, succulent, flavour-full food.

Cold smoking is achieved at temperatures between 20°C and ideally 25°C, often over a period of several days, and is a means of curing or preserving meats and fish and flavouring cheese. Food is soaked in a salt & sugar liquid first to remove excess moisture before being 'dried' in the smoking process. The smoke permeates the skin and acts as a barrier to bacteria and pests. Cold smoking requires careful temperature control to prevent the food from partially cooking - this would eradicate the preservative action of the cold smoking process. The ProQ smoker is not designed to cold smoke.

## Where to position your smoker

- ★ Your smoker is for use outdoors and should be sited in a sheltered position where possible. Low ambient temperatures and particularly snowy or windy weather will impact the internal temperature of your smoker. Nevertheless your smoker can be used all year round.
- ★ Food smokers do produce a lot of smoke and much of this is designed to seep out during the cooking process as the smoker construction needs to allow for the charcoal and wood chips to gently smoulder rather than burn up quickly or go out completely. The seals between the smoker components are loose to enable this to happen. You may need to bear this in mind when siting your smoker, particularly if you have close neighbours.

## Lighting the charcoal

- ★ 'Season' your smoker once before you use it to smoke food by lighting a small charcoal fire in the base unit. Once the charcoals have gone white hot with no further flame add the rest of the unit. Set the air vents to half open and add some wood chips to the fire through the bottom door. Then let the fire burn down till completely cold. This should take about 3 hours and will burn off any residues from the manufacturing process as well as sealing the interior surface.
- ★ Use a briquette charcoal rather than lumpwood where possible as it burns more evenly and for longer.
- ★ Leave the coals to burn for at least 20 minutes until they are no longer producing smoke and become just a pure heat source. At this point you are ready to add your wood smoke flavour.

## Creating wood smoke flavours

- ★ Soak wood chunks and chips in water - the bigger the wood size the longer they should be soaked - to prevent them burning rather than smouldering during the smoking process. Wood pellets can be used straight from the bag.
- ★ Place a handful of pellets in a foil pouch which should be pierced for the smoke to escape or place pellets or chips in a re-useable stainless steel smoker box or, for pellets only, a cast iron smoker pot to prolong and intensify smoke flavour production and to prevent the chips from burning. Place either foil pouch or smoker box directly on the charcoal.
- ★ Allow 10 to 30 minutes for the smoke flavour to develop. Don't be tempted to rush this by adding your wood product too early as if the charcoal base is too hot, it will simply burn producing more heat rather than smoke flavour.

- ★ You can use your own wood supplies in your smoker such as oak, alder, beech, apple or cherry. Ideally wait for the wood to season (as you would for use on wood burners etc.) before chopping into chunks of around 2" to 3" in size. Soak the wood overnight before placing on the hot charcoals to ensure maximum smoke and steam generation.
- ★ Do not use treated or resinous wood varieties (such as pine) in your smoker as these release unpleasant toxins which will taint your food. Conversely, the Ocote wood firelighters are ideal for the task of lighting your charcoals because of their high resin content. This will quickly burn away as the charcoals ignite and burn to white hot.
- ★ According to taste you may wish to top up your wood smoke flavour by adding more pellets or chips if you are smoking over long periods or add a larger amount from the outset for a denser smoke flavour.

### **The water pan**

- ★ Fill the water pan with water. This can be perfumed with aromatic herbs such as rosemary, mint or bay.
- ★ Use hot water in the water pan as this shortens the time for the smoker to get up to the right temperature.
- ★ You can also use a marinade in place of water in the water pan. There is some debate as to how much these liquid flavours infuse into your food, however, in our experience a marinade will add to the food flavour. We have used watered down versions of marinades used overnight on meats in preparation for smoking with great success. At the very least they create lovely aromas during the cooking process. The marinade can be any concoction of your choice with a wine and herb mix, cider or beer, wine vinegar or any other combination you may wish to try.
- ★ You can use your smoker without water in the water pan to create hotter cooking temperatures. You would nevertheless need to keep your water pan in place in the unit during your smoking session and line it with foil so that it catches any of the juices running from the food. You may not achieve as succulent a result without it, but the smoke infusion will work just as well.
- ★ For longer smoking sessions you may need to top up the water level to promote maximum succulence in your smoked food.

### **Using the air vents**

- ★ There are two air vents, one in the lid and one in the base. Open the one in the base to help establish your charcoal fire or later during the cooking process if you need to increase the burning rate and as a result the temperature.
- ★ Position your smoker so that the bottom air vent is opposite the wind direction so the wind will not penetrate the unit. This will help maintain an even temperature.
- ★ The top air vent should be left fully open during the cooking process to promote smoke and steam release.
- ★ To achieve a higher temperature and particularly to increase the cooking temperature if it has dropped during your smoking session, carefully turn the entire smoker so that the bottom air vent is facing the wind direction. This will allow more oxygen into your charcoals making them burn more quickly and increase heat within the unit overall.

### **What foods to smoke**

- ★ There are few if any limits to what you can smoke in your smoker. Any meat, poultry, fish or game in any type of meat cut is ideally suited to hot food smoking. You can also smoke seafood, vegetables and cheese. The smoking process is a very healthy cooking option which does not require the addition of oils and fats and yet still creates very succulent and highly tasty food.
- ★ Don't feel you should stick to smoking foods which are traditionally smoked, such as salmon, ham and bacon. Smoke flavours bring a whole new taste dimension to many foods not usually associated with smoking. Feel free to experiment!

### **Cooking times**

- ★ The longer you cook and the lower the temperature, the better the taste. Your ProQ smoker will reach a temperature of around 110°C. The lower the temperature the less moisture is lost from the food.

★ A medium whole chicken should take about 3 hours to cook whilst a 'cut', such as a chicken or duck breast will cook in approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. These times will vary depending on how much food you cook at the same time. A large joint of meat may take over 5 hours to cook.

★ Make sure the food to be cooked is at room temperature before placing in your smoker, otherwise there will be some heat loss as the smoker compensates for the cooling effect of the food.

★ To be completely sure that your food is cooked - particularly if you are cooking larger joints of meat or whole poultry - we recommend the use of a meat thermometer or temperature probe.

### **Before eating**

★ When first removed from your smoker, allow your smoked food - in particular large joints and whole birds - to rest, bearing in mind that the meat will continue to cook. Resting allows the juices to redistribute themselves creating a more tender result.

### **Maintaining your smoker**

★ If possible keep your smoker under cover in a garage or outbuilding when not in use. A vinyl cover is also available which will provide protection from the elements if kept outdoors.

★ The interior of your smoker will become browned from the smoking process, this coating will help to seal and protect your smoker. Clean the food grills, other cooking accessories, the water pan and the base unit after each use with hot soapy water, ideally when still warm, and do not use abrasive materials as this will damage the finish.

### **Troubleshooting**

★ **Depth of smoke flavour** - depending on the meat, the particular cut of meat and the wood smoke intensity you have been able to create, you may find that the smoke flavours do not permeate to the very inside of the meat, but remain in a halo around the surface. This is most likely the result of too high a cooking temperature and too short a cooking time.

★ **Heat Loss** - this is commonly caused by removing the domed lid to take a peek at the food. This causes loss of both heat and smoke build-up and will set your cooking time back by around 15 to 30 minutes. If you want to view the food, use the doors in the stacker components, but don't leave open for long.

★ **Pink colour to meat** - the smoking process makes meat appear to be pink whether cooked or not. The only way to be really sure this is a by-product of the smoking process and not that the meat is undercooked is to use a good quality meat thermometer.

★ **Temperature decrease** - if the cooking temperature sinks down before your food is successfully hot smoked you may need to top up the charcoal pan. This may be particularly required when cooking over longer periods. The best way to achieve this is to use a Charcoal Chimney Starter (available as a separate accessory) in which charcoal is established remotely from your smoker and, once at the required white hot/no flame level, can be tipped into the charcoal pan via the bottom door.

### **Any further questions?**

If you need any further help with the operation of your ProQ food smoker, please don't hesitate to call us on **08700 117883** or email us at [help@usefulstuff.co.uk](mailto:help@usefulstuff.co.uk) and we will be happy to help.

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