



## Rethinking The Traditional Easter Ham.

Easter has been celebrated since the dawn of time. It's origins come from two belief systems. Christianity and the worship of "Ishtar", the mother goddess. Christianity brought the belief of Christ's resurrection, which most likely didn't occur on the day we celebrate Easter (sorry guys!) and the worship of Ishtar brought us symbols of eggs and bunnies, which carried over into modern day celebrations. Centuries ago, after many people converted from paganism to Christianity, they mixed old pagan practices with newly adopted Christian practices. This, my friends, is the mashed up version of Easter - in an egg-shell.

Along with the Easter holiday comes feasting. Many traditional foods will grace tables and ham usually takes center stage. Ham / pork is a great example of how Easter traditions were passed through the ages. Like I said before, Easter is a big mixing pot of the worship of Christ and Ishtar. Pork, before Christ, was a forbidden food among the Jewish culture. This made it impossible for Jews and Gentiles to dine together. The Jews considered the Gentiles and the food they ate unclean. Today, Christians believe the Easter ham represents how Christ died for all, clean and unclean. So friends, this is a little background on why ham is served at the Easter table.

I like to cook an uncured ham for our Easter celebration. At the butcher shop this is called a fresh leg of ham. I also like to cook ours with the skin and fat on because pork can be a dry meat, especially if you cut away the fat. Leaving the fat on during roasting allows the fat to slowly baste the pork. So, when ordering from your butcher, ask for a fresh leg of ham with the skin on. Also give yourself at least a week to get the meat because this is a somewhat unusual order for the butcher. Not many folks order it this way.

Here is a simple recipe that I love and always use for our Easter dinner. There are many other ways to cook fresh leg of ham, but this just happens to be my favorite.

Enjoy!

- 1 10-12 pound butt fresh leg of ham, skin on
- 1 Tablespoon salt
- 1 Tablespoon ground black pepper
- 1 Cup maple syrup
- 1/2 Cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 Teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
- 1/2 Cup of walnuts
- 1/2 Cup dried figs

Pre-heat the oven to 450 degrees.

Score the fat in a diamond pattern. Make sure to cut just through the fat and not into the meat.

Rub the outside of the ham with salt and pepper. Make sure to rub in between the score marks.

Place the ham skin side up in the roasting pan (this allows the fat to run down the ham and moisten it all).

Cook for 20 minutes at the 450 degree temperature.

After the twenty minutes are up, turn down the temperature to 300 degrees.

In a bowl combine the maple syrup, balsamic, and the fresh rosemary.

Baste the ham every hour with this mixture until the center of the ham reaches an internal temperature of 145.

This can take 2.5 - 3 hours.

Dry roast the walnuts in a skillet. Chop the figs coarsely. Put the walnuts and the figs in a food processor and pulse until they are finely chopped.

When the ham is finished, sprinkle the walnuts and figs all over.

Then wrap the ham in foil and let rest 20- 30 minutes.

There is nothing better than sitting down to the holiday table with family, tasty food and an understanding of tradition – even if it is “in an eggshell”. Have a healthy and joy filled Easter - with lots of bunnies, eggs, and ham of course.