

Iberico Ham



The black Iberian pig lives primarily in the central and southwestern region of the Iberian Peninsula, which includes both Portugal and Spain.

Immediately after weaning, the piglets are fattened on barley and maize for several weeks. The pigs are then allowed to roam in pasture and oak groves to feed naturally on grass, herbs, acorns, chestnuts, and roots, until the slaughtering time approaches. At that point, the diet may be strictly limited to olives, chestnuts or acorns for the best quality *jamón ibérico*, or may be a mix of acorns and commercial feed for lesser qualities.

The hams from the slaughtered pigs are salted and left to begin drying for two weeks, after which they are rinsed and left to dry for another four to six weeks. The curing process then takes at least twelve months, although some producers cure their *jamones ibéricos* for up to 48 months.

In particular, the *ibérico* hams from the towns of Guijuelo in the Salamanca province and Jabugo in the Huelva province have their own *denominación de origen*.

The hams are labelled according to the pigs' diet and the percentage of the pigs' Iberian ancestry, with an acorn diet and pure-bred Iberians being most desirable. The current labelling system, based on a series of color-coded labels, was phased in starting in January 2014.

- The finest is called **jamón ibérico de bellota** (acorn). This ham is from free-range pigs that roam oak forests (called *dehesas*) along the border between Spain and Portugal and eat only acorns during this last period
- The exercise and diet have a significant effect on the flavour of the meat; the ham is cured for 36 months. This grade is divided into black-label *jamón 100% ibérico de bellota*, produced from pure-bred Iberian pigs, and red-label *jamón ibérico de bellota* from free-range pigs that are not pure-bred.
- The next grade is called **jamón ibérico cebo de campo**. This ham is from pigs that are pastured and fed a combination of acorns and grain.
- The third type is called **jamón ibérico de cebo**, or simply, *jamón ibérico* it is cured for 24 months and is the most popular due to its cheaper prices and shorter curing time. This ham is from pigs that are fed only grain.

Jamones de bellota are prized both for their smooth texture and rich, savory taste. A good *ibérico* ham has regular flecks of intramuscular fat (marbling).

The fat content is relatively high compared to *jamón serrano*, thus giving a rich taste.

The *jamón ibérico de cebo* is a national Spanish delicacy with a deep red almost black colour and even marbled fat through-out. As with the *serrano* there are so many ways to eat the *jamón ibérico* however the best way is to cut by hand and to eat the thinly sliced meat by itself.

