

## **Successful Meat Cookery**

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Knowing how to select the best cooking method for a particular cut of meat will help make your meal an enjoyable experience. All too often, consumers prepare a nice cut of meat only to have it look and taste like shoe leather. To avoid this problem, it is necessary to understand how cooking, or heating, can influence the tenderness, flavor and aroma, color and juiciness of cooked meat.

Ironically, heating can cause both tenderization and toughening of meat. In general, as meat is heated, some meat proteins become firm and harden which leads to toughening. Heat also induces collagen, which is connective tissue, to break down causing meat tenderization.

There are three basic methods that are used to cook meat. These are dry heat cookery, moist heat cookery and microwaving. Broiling and roasting are examples of dry heat cookery. Since the heating period during broiling is generally short, there is not enough time for collagen to break down. Unique flavors and extensive surface browning occur during broiling due to high surface temperatures. It is recommended that you select tender cuts such as beef rib and loin steaks, some beef steaks from the round and pork chops if you plan to broil your meat.

Tender roasts may be roasted using dry heat at oven temperatures of 300 to 350F. To prevent excessive moisture losses and keep your roast juicy, cover the roast with foil or a source of fat such as bacon strips. As with broiling, dry roasting will impart a unique flavor due to surface browning of the meat.

Meat cuts containing large amounts of connective tissue should be cooked using moist heat to tenderize the meat. The meat should be roasted in a closed container containing added water, at low temperatures, over a longer cooking time than is used for dry roasting to tenderize the collagen without causing toughening of other meat proteins. Braising or making a pot roast are examples of moist heat cookery. Beef chuck, round, brisket and tip roasts become very tender and flavorful when prepared using moist cookery.

To cook meat rapidly, a microwave can be used. Although this method will cook meat faster than using conventional cooking methods, there can be quite a bit of variability in the evenness of doneness and tenderness throughout the meat cut. Unless your microwave has a browning unit, the meat may be less flavorful. Processed meats such as frankfurters, bacon, and precooked items are recommended for microwave cookery. Many cookbooks provide thorough instructions for cooking meat. Or, contact your local

county extension office for more details on how to prepare tender, flavorful meals with meat.