

MORRIS RECIPES 1

ROASTING AN OX

Taken from "Caterer & Hotelkeeper" 29 April 1977 p 55.

A turn-spit for open-air carcass roasting can be made by fixing a sturdy cart wheel to a strong galvanised pipe, about 3 in. diameter, on which the carcass will be impaled, skewered and wired. This pipe will be set into grooves on top of the side walls so that the carcass can be rotated by an operator standing at the side of the fire.

Preparations for an ox roasting must be planned well in advance. Having decided on the carcass, you must then fix the date for the animal to be killed, how it is to be dressed, how long it will take to roast, how many carvers will be required and how many people will be required to serve it.

The site should be flat and in a well sheltered part of the field, half-backing to the prevailing wind so that smoke and fumes blow away from the roast. Portable corrugated iron screens can be moved into strategic positions should the wind change or become too strong. They can also be used as temporary shelter for the fire in the event of heavy rain.

The actual dimensions of the turn-spit will depend on the size of the carcass, but for the average size a clearance of 6 feet in length and a distance of 3 feet between the revolving rod and the basting pan should be allowed. The back wall and the wings should be about 5 feet in height and supported by buttresses. The fire (not directly under the carcass, but to one side), should be raised on furnace bars about 1 foot off the ground and built up to a depth of about 2 feet at the back so that the heat is radiated on to the carcass as it slowly revolves. The fire should be at least 6 ins. longer each end than the carcass being roasted. The ash pit must be properly vented and a fender barrier provided to prevent drippings falling into the cinders. The drip tray, parallel to the fire, must be set low enough to prevent the drippings being burnt by the intense heat and the grooves for the revolving rod must allow for adjustment so that the carcass can be moved nearer to or further away from the line of fire.

The fire should be started some hours before cooking begins to allow it to get well burnt through and provide an even flow of heat to the full length of the spit. Later on, when the carcass is being roasted, the fire will have to be reduced at the forequarter end or this will become over-roasted before the hindquarter is cooked. By the time the carcass is brought to the turn-spit, a sound strong fire should be burning equally all over - if this is not so the carcass will not be properly roasted nor will it have that uniform colour which is one of the beauties of a good outdoor roast. The fire should be constantly tended and kept clear at the bottom and care should be taken to see that no smoky fuel comes to the front, as this will spoil the look and the taste of the meat.

The larger the carcass, the further it must be kept from the fire. In the early stages the meat should not be too near the fire because if it gets scorched the outside will become hard and acquire a disagreeable taste. The heat will also be prevented from penetrating the meat and the carcass will appear to be done before it is more than half cooked. If the fire is right, the roasting should start off at about two feet from the fire.

If metal screens are used, the reflected heat will help to achieve a more uniform roasting of the hindquarters when placed in front of the thicker parts. The thicker parts of the carcass will roast uniformly with the thinner flank if the carcass is kept longer on its back and it is here that skill is required in revolving the wheel - slowly when the thick part faces the fire and quickly when the flank or belly comes into line with the heat. Frequent basting is essential.

Test by pressing the lean parts with the thumb to see if the flesh yields easily - this is a sign that it is done enough, but the time the carcass has been cooking, the strength of the fire, and the distance the spit has been from it will have to be taken into consideration before declaring that the carcass is ready to carve.

The yield is difficult to forecast and will depend on how much fat the animal carried, how carefully it has been cooked, and how expertly the carvers carry out their job. As a guide, you can anticipate that something approaching 50% of the total weight will be lost by shrinkage and bone and the net weight of cooked meat required for a portion will be in the region of 2-3 ox. per person.