

Making a Smoker and Smoker Cabinet

A smoker cabinet can feature any construction from cardboard box to insulated smokehouse or even an upcycled Portaloo. The first question to ask yourself is whether you want to *cook* as you smoke your food as a flavouring objective or whether you want to smoke *as a means of preservation* and *flavouring* then decide *how often* you need to smoke and the financial constraints of your hobby. The only essential is making the smoke chamber reasonably smoke tight between smoke inlet and chimney and ensuring that the smoke distributes evenly around the food to be smoked.



At it's simplest, all you need is a cardboard box, a [biscuit or tomato tin and a soldering iron](#) or [ProQ sawdust smoker](#), temperature gauge, a [stackable baking rack](#) and a [timer](#) to remind you to refill with sawdust. If you are spending serious money on your hobby then you are probably doing something wrong or getting a bit commercial since there is no substitute for experience and peasant skill.



'Cold smoking' is carried out at *ambient* temperature $\leq 8^{\circ}\text{C}$ and therefore better suited to Winter months. Cold smoking in itself is not by itself enough to make organic material [shelf stable](#) without cooking with heat to kill off potentially hazardous bacteria unless used in conjunction with curing and air drying to reduce water activity to below 0.9Aw - otherwise know as 'firm to the touch!'.
'

The difference between *curing-cold smoking-drying* and *cooking with heat* is that it is a good method of long term preservation which has been used for thousands of years without scientific knowledge or commercial apparatus. Consequently, cold smoking is perfect for bacon, ham, sausages, cheese, garlic or spices as it can be carried out home with minimal equipment.

For beginners, the [ProQ sawdust smoker](#) is a very simple and efficient device for cold smoking since it generates negligible little heat and can be used inside a stockpot, packing chest or dustbin sized smokebox and smoke gently for 8-10 hours unattended depending on the wood hardness. A ProQ's virtue is simplicity and ease of use combined with pocketability so you can take them camping and fishing.



By contrast *hot smoking* is used where you want to *cook* the product with heat as it smoked e.g. chicken or frankfurters. That means you need a [temperature probe](#) for your food and racks for more delicate items like fish which can fall apart if overcooked. It also means hot smoking is more of an outdoor activity. This should also tell you that really you would be best advised to make different smokers designed for hot or cold smoking.

In almost all smoker setups *simplicity is a virtue* so it is a good idea to build up some practical and taste experience before lashing out any money on automated machinery which may not do a superior job since smoked food is a very personal preference.

Most commercial smokers are made of metal and/or the manufacturer wants to make money by selling you massively overpriced sawdust pellets or other consumables. By contrast, if you want to smoke just one trout or a handful of sausages or one beef rib, a smoke generator that will fit in a large stockpot and smoke unattended overnight makes smoking an achievable activity even with a busy job and a house full of children.



Conversely, the advantage of automation is to *repeatability* and the ability to smoke reliably unattended (unless you use something like a [ProQ sawdust smoker](#) below) which is one reason I rate the [ProQ smoker](#).



As a novice, what you will soon discover is that food smoked commercially tastes pretty much the same and the smoke flavour you are used to was achieved with the application of [liquid smoke](#). By contrast, when you smoke yourself you can control *how long* to smoke and the *flavour* of the smoke by using different hardwoods. There is very little you cannot smoke so meat, fish, game, salt, cheese, chillies and even ingredients in chutneys and cures are all candidates.

For regular amateur cold smoking a simple [IKEA plastic box](#) with a [baked bean tin smoke generator](#) or [water bottle smoke generator](#) is a not too ambitious [project](#). For a more sophisticated smoker a simple firebox can