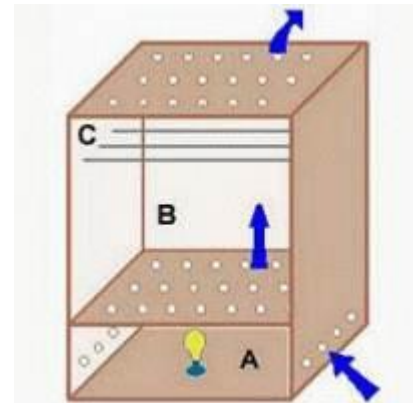


Tombeej's Biltong Box

The concept of a biltong box is built around the need to get the meat to dry as quickly and as effectively as possible (obviously). The drying process needs (1) heat and (2) breeze/draft.

The way this is generally done:

- A standard 100W light bulb to create the heat.
- Air vents at the bottom and the top of the box to facilitate the up-draft.



My Biltong Box:

I know a talented Zimbabwean cupboard maker here in Ballito. I've employed his wife and I've helped buy him a car (and got it branded). In return he's done quite a bit of work for me in my home and made me this biltong box using a design I gave him as a 'thank you'. So it looks a lot larnier than it really needs to be, but I'm not complaining ☺.



Front view



Side view

Note the top and bottom vents. The holes are protected from pests from getting into the box and to your meat.

You can use simple mesh on the inside of your holes, or these stock plastic vent covers used in kitchen cupboards like I have, which you can buy at any hardware store.

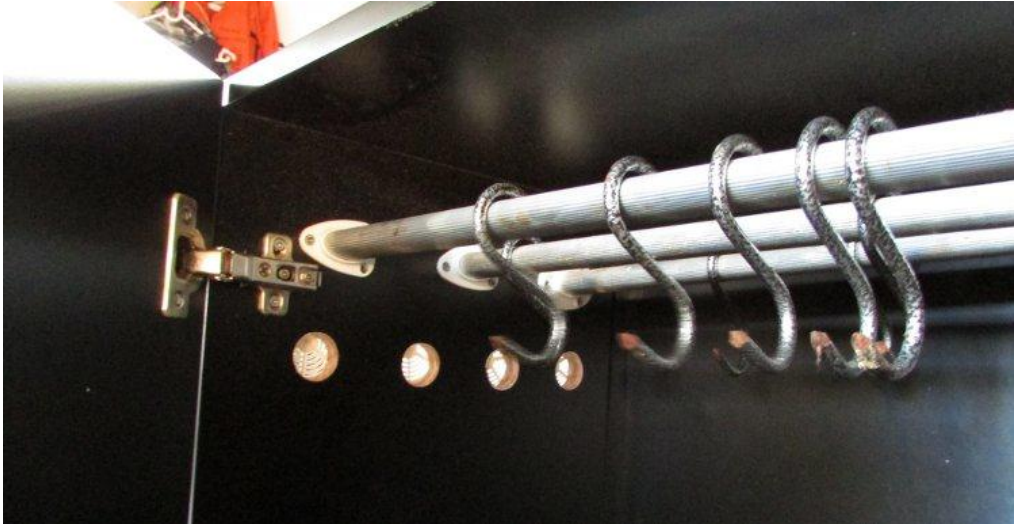
The inside of my box:



There are two sections to the box. The bottom section houses the light bulb and is designed to protect the light bulb from sauce dripping off the new cuts, while still providing enough up-draft of warm air to the top section where the meat is hung.

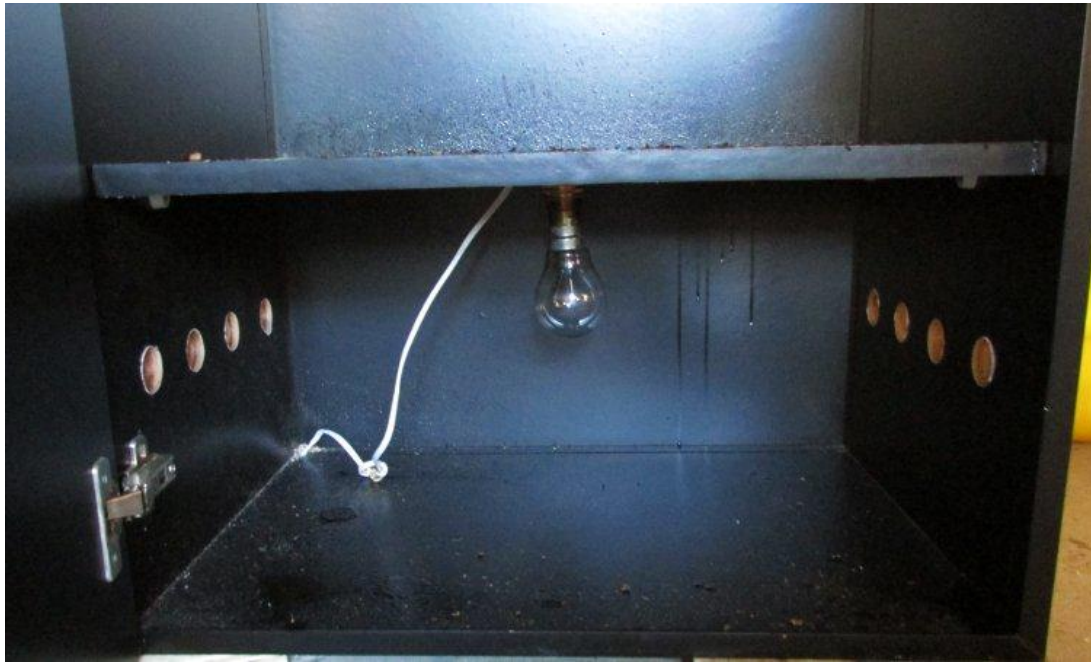
Let's start from the top. A few photos of the hanging racks + removable hanging hooks, and of course the top vent holes:





And now the bottom section:





This is what I mean about dripping sauce (below). This mess happened after the missus decided to try hanging the cuts after soaking without first shaking off excess sauce and patting them down with spices. It normally never gets this messy though, and it's easy enough to clean up after each batch.

Notice how the holes have been drilled. The area directly above the bulb has no holes – to protect it while still allowing the free flow of warm air into the top section.



That's the box done.

Prepping the meat:

STEP 1: Choosing the meat

1. The most common cut used for biltong is silverside roast. It has some nice fat, but not a lot. But to be honest, any good piece of meat can be turned into biltong.
2. For a good LCHF cut I don't normally buy the pre-packed meat you find on the shelves (most of the fat has generally been removed). I go to the butcher behind the counter and ask for fatty cuts, generally rump. I get to choose nice fatty cuts just the way I like it.
3. Grain-fed vs grass-fed.... Since mainstream grain-fed beef is cheaper, do your first few batches with this until you've learnt from your mistakes. Then start buying from a good butcher who sells grass-fed beef.

STEP 1: Soaking the cuts

I'm still new at this, so this is what I've learnt from my limited experience:

- The standard mix is 50% brown vinegar and 50% Worcestershire sauce. It's a good mix, and I've learnt that the vinegar is important. Because if you don't use it, very quickly your newly drying meat develops white spots of mould all over it – well before it has a chance to dry.
 - Other recipes include sweet chilli sauce and/or chutney. This makes delicious biltong, but I doubt it's a good thing in terms of LCHF.
 - In fact, once I've got the hang of all this I might start dropping the Worcestershire sauce completely. Its ingredients are: vinegar, molasses, cane sugar, salt, spices, colorant, tamarind extract, lemon oil and flavouring. But we've already got the vinegar and we'll soon be adding the salt and spices in the next step, so really no need for that other sugary stuff.
- Soak the cuts for a few hours. It really depends on you. Some soak for 2 – 3 hrs while I like to soak mine at least 10 hours.



STEP 2: The Spices

- Everyone has their own 'secret recipe' when it comes to the spices, but the basics are salt, black pepper, maybe some paprika or dried chillies for a bit of heat, rosemary, marjoram... in fact, any spice that naturally compliments beef.
- The real challenge is how much of each spice. For example, my first-ever batch didn't have enough salt. But my second batch was way, way too salty. Many people who start making their own biltong will say the same thing: their first batch wasn't too good, but with each new attempt it gets better and better as you tweak the ingredients and their quantities until the perfect 'secret recipe' is found.
- I pull my cuts out the sauce, shake off the excess and then dab each one individually with the spice mix. That way, I know each cut is getting just the right amount.
- Some people then leave the meat to sit in the spices for a few more hours. I don't see the need – I just hang immediately.

STEP 3: The Wait

- For 'wet' biltong you need only 2 ½ days or so. For meat to dry all the way through, leave around 3 days.
- The smaller cuts obviously dry quicker than large cuts, and some biltong boxes will dry meat quicker than others (different box sizes, but also some people have more than one light bulb, while others include fans).
- You'll soon figure out how long you need to dry your own meat in the way you like it. Again, the only way is by trial and error.

STEP 4: LCHF Biltong

- The great thing about making your own biltong is that besides being way, way cheaper than the store-bought stuff, you can also make some really special LCHF biltong.
- Once I pull the biltong off the hooks the first thing I do is cut off all the fat (along with some of the black meat as well). The lean biltong is cut the traditional way and kept for family & friends. The 'good stuff' is kept in a ziplock bag and stored in a cool cupboard.
- It's best to cut the fat into small blocks or slivers (it's not pleasant trying to chew on a large piece of biltong fat). But when chopped into small bits it becomes very easy to eat.
- I notice that my LCHF biltong gets better every day. The slivers get softer, more 'buttery', more delicious by the day. But if stored too long I've noticed the black meat in the packet may start to pick up signs of that white mould. The fat seems to be immune to this problem.
- Once I've cut away the fat and have chopped into small pieces, I like to add a very small amount of my spices into the packet and mix it all in.



Traditional cuts for the family

LCHF biltong ('the good stuff')

In terms of LCHF, this food will have its small percentage of carbs (from the w.sauce and the spices) and then you can easily maintain your estimated 80% fat / 15% protein split by the way you cut your biltong.

Is this the ultimate LCHF food?

Maybe...