

# COUNTRY HAM AND RED EYE GRAVY

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Follow our step-by-step, photo illustrated recipe to make this traditional Southern favorite of Country Ham and Red Eye Gravy. The gravy may be somewhat of an acquired taste, but it's too easy to make to not give it a try. We'll fry up the Country Ham, make the gravy and show you how to take breakfast up to another level. Printable recipe included.



## Country Ham with Red Eye Gravy Recipe:

Through the years, many a person has started their day with a breakfast consisting of Country Ham and Red Eye Gravy. Country Ham itself is a cured ham, first mentioned in print back in 1944, and referred to as a method of curing and often times smoking of pork meat. It's typically very salty.

According to the online encyclopedia known as Wikipedia, Red Eye Gravy is mostly associated with the Southern United States and is made from the pan drippings left from cooking country ham, or bacon, and is normally made using black coffee to deglaze the pan. The name itself comes from the appearance of the gravy once it's been placed in a serving bowl. The dark coffee and meat bits sink to the bottom, a layer of grease is usually visible on top, and the result gives the appearance of a human eye. And, so ends our History lesson for the day.

The December issue of Our State Magazine contained an article about Henry West down in Duplin County here in North Carolina, and told about his Westwater Country Hams. It's an interesting read and brought back lots of memories from my childhood as I watched my dad rub salt all over a ham or two right after we had killed hogs on Thanksgiving Day. Later, he'd hang them up in an old storage building out back of our house where they would remain for months before we ever had the chance to enjoy their distinct flavor.

I've been telling my older brother lately, that I've recently developed a "hankering" to try and cure a ham myself. I'm not sure where the urge is coming from other than all the cookbooks and stories I've been reading over the past few years, and the many stories my brother tells me while we travel the roads of North Carolina and beyond delivering his custom built pig cookers. He thinks I'm a bit wacky, but he's offered his tool shed to let me hang it up in. We'll see.

I do hope you'll give our Red Eye Gravy recipe a try. If you enjoy Country Ham and ever cook it at home, the gravy is just too quick and simple to not try out at least one time. I'll be waiting to hear from you in the Comment section below and feel free to share your memories of Country Ham with us as well. So, if you're ready... Let's Get Cooking.



**Country Ham and Red Eye Gravy:** You'll need these ingredients. Yep, there's some coffee in that cup.



Most center cut slices of ham are pretty large. It will be easier to fry if you'll cut the slice in half.



Cut through the layer of fat around the slices about every three inches. This will help keep the ham slice from curling so bad while it cooks. Some folks also like to remove the "rind" or outer skin layer from the ham slice prior to cooking. That's an option that's entirely up to you. I left it on this slice.



Country Ham is usually very salty. I prefer to soak my slices in water for 30 minutes to an hour to try and reduce some of that salty taste. It's still going to be pretty salty even after you soak it. Soaking is not required but I highly recommend it. A glass pie dish comes in handy for soaking one or two pieces. Just place the ham in the dish, cover with water, and let sit for for about 30 minutes or longer. Some of the water will also absorb back into the ham and cause it to plump up a bit. Some folks soak in milk, but water will work just fine.



When the ham is ready to fry, remove it from the water and pat it dry with some paper towels. Then, place your skillet over medium heat on your stove top. When the pan gets hot, drop in about one Tablespoon of Butter.



Place the ham in the skillet. As you can see, this is one slice of ham and it fills up my 10 inch skillet.



Country Ham will cook pretty quick. Turn it after about two minutes and let it cook until the fat around the edge is translucent. Do not overcook the ham, it can get really tough and dry if you do. Most folks that don't like Country Ham have probably only had ham that was over cooked. Having said that, my late wife would order a ham biscuit at a drive-thru and tell them she wanted the hardest, driest piece of ham they had. If they didn't have one, she'd ask that they "burn it" for her. To each his own... right?



Just cook it until you get it the way you like it. When it's ready, remove it from the pan.



Don't throw out the good stuff though. We're going to use the pan drippings from the cooked ham to make our Red Eye Gravy. You will need about two Tablespoons of the grease. If you have more than that in the pan, pour it out but save all the hard bits and pieces inside the skillet. Place it back on the heat.



Pour the cool coffee into the skillet. It will steam up and start to deglaze the pan.



Use a spatula and scrape the bottom of the pan as you stir the liquid. You want to break all the bits and pieces free from the bottom of the skillet.



Then, add in the water. I'm using cool tap water, straight from the faucet. Stir that around some more.



Continue to stir and scrape the bottom of the skillet as you let the liquid come back up to a low boil. Then, reduce the heat and let the gravy simmer and reduce. You'll need to taste it to see if it needs anything. You could add a little more Salt or maybe some Black Pepper if need be. The gravy needs to reduce down to about half it's volume and the flavors will become more intense and concentrated in the process.



Your Red Eye Gravy should be ready in just a few minutes. Remove the pan from the stove and pour the gravy in a small serving dish or gravy boat.



Serve the Red Eye Gravy as a side with your Country Ham slices. Some folks like to dip a biscuit into the gravy and use it as an au jus. It's great to drizzle over the ham slice itself, or to add a bit of gravy to your cooked grits. You might also like to keep a bit of Jelly handy to help offset the saltiness in the Country Ham, but either way you try it... Enjoy!