

# The New York Times

## Bitten

Mark Bittman on Food



July 29, 2008, 2:41 pm

## Playing Around with Prosciutto *By [Mark Bittman](#)*

Domestic prosciutto was practically a contradiction in terms until recently, but several producers have changed that. I was an early fan of Armandino Batali's (Mario's dad: you can take a look [at this](#) and also [this](#).)

I've followed a few other producers, and — on an extremely small scale — I've even been a producer, at one time curing ham in my garage in Woodbridge, Conn.

Anyway, I'd not known about [La Quercia](#), but a knowledgeable friend suggested I check it out, and over the last few days I've quite happily engaged in eating their prosciutto. As someone who spent enough time in Spain over the last year to know that "pata negra" is not only the phrase for the best pig but slang for the best of anything (as in "eres pata negra") I would say that La Quercia's product is playing in the right league. (The prices aren't bad either.)

I'm not a prosciutto critic, but I know this was a joy to taste (I didn't have a good enough knife to cut proper slices) and fabulous in cooking. Day one was one of my favorite pasta dishes, taught to me, as many of my favorites are, by my friend Andrea: in olive oil, very slowly simmer diced prosciutto, dried chilis and as many cloves of garlic as you have — I mean, 10 per person isn't too many. When the garlic is really, really soft, scoop it and the ham and chilis out, and add a couple of cups of crushed tomatoes to the pan. Cook until they become saucy, then make pasta and toss it with the tomatoes, garlic and so on, and a lot of basil.

The second dish was nearly as good as the first (and I got to eat it on the beach, at room temperature, pretty ideal circumstances). Same beginning, but with less garlic, and slivered; I used a hot chili, a mild chili, and a chipotle — really a good combo. When the garlic threatened to brown, I added a sliced sweet onion, a couple of sliced Anaheim peppers (the pale green, "frying" kind), and cooked it all until soft. Then came a huge, not very good eggplant, cut into big chunks. I cooked that until it was, well, mush. I forgot the basil, and I forgot the parsley, and it was still terrific. I thrilled to every bite of prosciutto.

The third dish was inferior, but showed — to me, at least — how a little prosciutto can go a long way: oil, prosciutto, onion, bell pepper, garlic (can't live without it), all cooked until nearly browned. Chopped collards, parsley. With Parmesan, a decent soup in about 30 minutes. (Actually, [this one](#) is better.)

I still have a pound of prosciutto left, and I'm only a day away from that good knife . . .