

# The Washington Post

## Food

### Pastrami on the rise

By David Hagedorn, February 12, 2013



**Wagshal's Delicatessen**  
4855 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
202-363-5698

Bill Fuchs

This Spring Valley institution works it old-style. The pastrami's flesh is dark and has a distinctive dark black line of crust around it that none of the other pastramis here do. It's juicy and lush-tasting, the closest approximation to what you'd remember from childhood. "One thing that sets us apart is that we use USDA Prime beef," says Fuchs. He contends that the meat must be sliced thin to enhance the richness of the mouth feel and meld its flavors completely.

\$6.99

5 ounces/\$1.40

Yes/\$11.99

Whole (the point, which is fattier, and the flat, which is leaner)

Wet-cured for 12-14 days, crusted with spice, dry-cured for 12-14 days, hickory-smoked for 6-8 hours, baked at 180 degrees for 2-3 hours, until tender. Sliced and steamed to order.

Deep adobe color, dark crust, very thin (1/8-inch) slices /melty tender

Smoky, spicy/  
marbled, high fat

Washington, a pastrami mecca? Taste it for yourself: Over the past year, pedigreed chefs have taken on the challenge of curing, spicing and smoking their own and have been showcasing it on trend-driven menus.

We hit the pastrami circuit to investigate, but first we paid a visit to a Washington institution: [Wagshal's Delicatessen](#). There, owner Bill Fuchs set the bar years ago, long before pastrami became highbrow.

The basic formula for pastrami-making is this: Beef brisket is brined for about a week in a salt solution with sodium nitrite (to preserve color) and pickling spices, such as bay leaf, mustard seed, coriander seed, peppercorns, allspice and cloves. Then it gets crusted with a peppercorn-and-coriander-based spice mix and smoked for hours. After that, the meat is steamed until tender. Some chefs adhere to the formula; others deviate. Some slice it razor-thin; some prefer it a half-inch thick. Adjusting processing times, devising proprietary spice mixes and combining smoking woods are all ways to stamp a brisket as their own.