

# ROASTING

## SLOW-ROASTED PORK BELLY

A wondrous reminder of just how much flavour is carried by fat and how good roasting pork smells. You can roast this and serve it with an apple sauce (from a jar, why not?), making it sort of British, but I reckon Chinese-style flavourings work better, and this is definitely the basis for experimenting by even the most inexperienced cook without recipes. The worst thing which can go wrong is to use too much five-spice powder, and that's not always bad anyway.

### How to do it:

1 – 1.5 kg/ 2-3lb boned belly of pork, rind on  
30-40g/2-3oz piece of fresh ginger, peeled  
1 or 2 garlic cloves  
2 tablespoons clear honey  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
4 tablespoons soy sauce  
2 tablespoons sweet chilli sauce  
1 teaspoon five-spice powder

Score the rind of the pork deeply in a criss-cross pattern. If you have a biddable butcher, ask him or her to do this, otherwise you'll have to be certain you have an exceptionally sharp and tough knife: a Stanley knife with a new blade is ideal. Cut the ginger into thin slices, and then chop together with the garlic to make a lumpy sort of paste. Smear this into the hatching. Mix together the remaining ingredients and then pour over the meat, again making sure it gets into the interstices. Cover and let marinate for four hours at cool room temperature or for 12 or more hours in a refrigerator. Bring back to room temperature before cooking.

Cook at 170C/325F for 2 ½ to 3 hours, Basting no more than twice. Test with a skewer to see how tender it is. It should be pretty much cooked now but you can give it another 1 – 1½ hours, depending on what else you are doing and if you want it even more melting. Turn up the heat quite high for a final 30 minutes to add a good glaze, but watch it doesn't burn. Rest at least 20 minutes before cutting, which you should be able to do with a spoon.

This is the best thing imaginable when eaten cold. When it's warm (rather than hot) you can go Caucasian and serve it with very creamy mashed potatoes (I'd put finely chopped raw garlic and parsley into them) plus a sharp apple sauce and something green. Cabbage cooked with very little water but masses and masses of black pepper, drained and tossed with butter would be great.

To go rather more Oriental, serve a microwave stir-fry of mixed peppers with loads of garlic and plain or pineapple rice – rice into which you have stirred finely chopped fresh pineapple and plenty of black pepper.

## GOOSING YOUR SPUDS

For the ultimate crisp-roasted potato, a golden tumble of crunch-coated spuds with snowy interiors, you must use starchy potatoes – the starchier and more floury the better. King Edwards or Desiree, both white and red are first choice, but so are Maris Piper, Cara and, in Australasia, at least, the wonderful Agria. Delia Smith is specially cherished for telling us to roughen up the outside of part-cooked potatoes to help ensure a really crisp coating. Gary Rhodes went even further by then frying the potatoes to brown them before they go into the oven for final roasting, an acceptable cheat which had never occurred to me. But he also added a fabulous High Poncing About Factor by suggesting you pare away some or much of the curved side of each halved potato so they are all the same shape and size . . . get real, mate!

Second, you should use goose fat and this is very readily available from supermarket shelves. Otherwise be very choosy about the oil or fat in which you fry or roast, as these will each give a different result and each will thus go better or worse with what else there is on the plate. Olive oil is best with chicken or lamb, lesser flavoured vegetable oils marry better with beef or pork. The wickedness factor of the goose fat means it goes with everything, on principle.

### **How to do it:**

Allow three potato portions or more per person: each portion is half a peeled, medium-sized potato halved along its length. Thus for four servings you would want at least 12 portions, that is six medium-sized starchy potatoes cut in half. For maximum PAF effect, follow the less-travelled Rhodes and trim the curved side of the potatoes so they look approximately the same. This works best if you swear you took great trouble to buy potatoes all the same size. More impressive than sadly owning up to what you have really done.

Part cook them five minutes from the time they come to the boil after starting them in cold water. You get better flavour doing this in the microwave, in which case add a few tablespoons of water to the flattish dish in which you do, and then microwave on High for four to five minutes per 500g weight. Give them a good mix around half way through.

Drain the potatoes in a colander and shake them about brutally, to rough up their outside edges. Then melt plenty of goose fat in a pan and fry the potatoes, turning them from time to time until nicely golden brown. There is a school of thought which first rolls the spuds in flour but why add another starch when they have so much of their own? That seems a PAFing about too far.

Pour the goose fat you have used into a roasting pan, melt in some more and then roast the spuds in a hot oven for about half an hour, turn them and roast for another 30 minutes or more. Draining the spuds on some kitchen towel ameliorates their high fat content somewhat, but it's hardly in the spirit of this orgy of fat and starch, so I never bother. Sprinkle the crisp, hot roasted potatoes lightly with salt. Take the applause. Never admit you trimmed the potatoes to make them the same shape.