

Arrosto of Duroc Pork with Roasted Heirloom Apples

SERVES 10 TO 12

There's an old farm phrase that I love: When something is extra-fancy it's called "high cotton." The topmost cotton bolls on the plant produce the finest cotton, woven into what you'd wear to church or a wedding. This dish is high cotton in flavor but low cotton in spirit, because the pork shoulder was traditionally an affordable cut of meat. (I think of this as a *Brady Bunch* classic—pork chops and applesauce—turned on its Italian ear.) You can make the apples up to three days in advance and keep them covered in the fridge.

At our house, this is an overnight dish, because I slide it into the oven just before I go to sleep and I only have to get out of bed once to remove the foil halfway through cooking. When you wake up in the morning, the house smells fantastic. Let the roast cool in its own juices, and serve as a lunch-hour supper or as a long-weekend or holiday brunch. You can also begin cooking at 6 A.M., so the roast comes out just in time for a late-night dinner.

This recipe calls for butterflying the pork, then seasoning and rolling it. Take advantage of your butcher's expertise. Bring along this book and ask for help. This is a dish meant for real meat, not small portions on Styro-foam trays.

If you don't want to deal with the steps involved in butterflying the meat, you can just season the pork shoulder and slide the whole piece of meat into a preheated 275°F oven, slow-cooking for 10 hours or until the meat falls apart at a touch.

It's worth finding Duroc or Berkshire pork for this long-cooked dish. Visit Heritage Foods at www.heritagefoodsusa.com for more options than you might have in your local grocery store.

ROASTED HEIRLOOM APPLES

12 Gravenstein or McIntosh apples
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tablespoon minced fresh sage
½ teaspoon finely ground sea salt, preferably gray salt, or kosher salt
⅓ cup honey

ZINFANDEL MOSTO COTTO

One 750-ml bottle red wine, preferably a fruity Zinfandel
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
4 tablespoons high-quality red wine vinegar
1 cinnamon stick
Zest of 1 lemon

8-pound boneless pork butt or pork shoulder, butterflied (see Chef's Note, facing page)
Sea salt, preferably gray salt
Freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons Toasted Spice Rub (recipe follows)

FOR THE APPLES: Preheat the oven to 425°F. Peel and core the apples, then cut into 1-inch wedges and toss them in a bowl with the lemon juice to keep them from oxidizing. Heat a medium, ovenproof sauté pan or skillet over medium-high heat, add the butter, and cook until it begins to brown. Add the sage, apples, and ½ teaspoon salt and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the apple edges just begin to color. Add the honey, transfer the pan to the oven, and roast for about 20 minutes, or until the apples are soft and lightly browned. Mash with a fork for a chunky version or purée in a food processor for a smoother sauce. Set aside.

FOR THE MOSTO COTTO: Pour the wine into a medium saucepan. Add the sugar and 2 tablespoons of the vinegar. Reduce this to a syrup over medium-high heat; don't let it stay at a rolling boil but try to keep it at a strong simmer. The bubbles will grow larger when the liquid reaches a syrupy consistency. At this point, add the cinnamon and lemon zest. Take the pan off the heat and let the mosto come to room temperature, 20 to 30 minutes.

Add the remaining two tablespoons of vinegar and allow the mosto to cool. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer or a chinois. This keeps for up to 3 months refrigerated in an airtight container.

Preheat the oven to 275°F. Unroll the butterflied pork and season the top side with the salt, pepper, and 2 tablespoons of the spice rub. Roll up the meat and secure with kitchen twine every 2 inches, or make a butcher's knot (see Chef's Note, page 33). Don't make the twine too tight, because after 8 hours of cooking, it'll be a challenge to cut it away; just secure it tightly enough so the pork doesn't come unrolled. Season the outside of the meat with salt and the remaining 2 tablespoons spice rub, being sure to season the ends of the roll, too. Using a sheet of aluminum foil, cover the thin end where there is no fat.

Put the pork in a roasting pan and bake for 8 hours, removing the foil after 4 hours of cooking. Remove from the oven and let rest in the pan for 30 minutes.

Cut the pork into slices as best you can. The meat will be so tender it will fall apart, but nobody will mind if slices aren't precise. (If you want real slices, bust out the electric knife.) Make sure to remove the twine before serving. Prop the pork on top of the apples (either rewarmed or served at room temperature) and drizzle the plate with mosto cotto and pan juices if you like.

CHEF'S NOTE: To butterfly a pork shoulder (with some help from your butcher), first, go to a real butcher shop—a place that doesn't sell meat wrapped in plastic. Buy a pork shoulder and ask the butcher to make it a single sheet in thickness. You want a thin sheet of meat about 20 inches long.

When the sheet is open, you'll see a gland that has to be removed. Scrape it off with a small knife and discard the gland. You can remove some fat from the sheet, but leave a good amount because this will baste the pork while it cooks. When you have the sheet thin and fairly even, give it a practice roll to see if it still looks even. If not, unroll the sheet again, and even it out. You can slice off sections of the meat and place them in thin spots. When you're finished, roll it up again until you're happy with the evenness of the roll.

Toasted Spice Rub

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

¼ cup fennel seeds
1 tablespoon coriander seeds
1 tablespoon black peppercorns
1 ½ teaspoons red pepper flakes
¼ cup pure California chile powder
2 tablespoons kosher salt
2 tablespoons ground cinnamon

In a small skillet, toast the fennel seeds, coriander seeds, and peppercorns over medium heat, tossing frequently, until the fennel seeds turn light brown. Don't let them get dark. Turn your exhaust fan to high, add the red pepper flakes, and toss-toss-toss (just three times), then immediately remove from the heat and empty onto a plate to cool completely.

In a blender, combine the cooled spices (don't try to grind the spices before they're at room temperature, or they will gum up your blender's blades), chile powder, salt, and cinnamon. Blend until finely and evenly ground. If you have a small spice mill or a coffee grinder dedicated to spices, grind the fennel, coriander, peppercorns, and red pepper flakes, then empty into a bowl and stir in the chile powder, salt, and cinnamon. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dark place for up to 4 months, or freeze for up to 1 year.