

Pork Belly

There are thousands of ways to cook pork belly, this is simply the way I prefer. It's a very easy recipe but one of my most impressive meals. People keep thanking me for going out of my way to make such fancy food for them. Just be aware that pork belly is quite high in calories, 520 calories per 100g (0.2 lb).

Ingredients:

- pork belly (skin on)
- beef stock cube (or leftover stock)
- garlic
- red wine (optional)
- boiling water
- coarse salt
- olive oil
- thyme/rosemary
- lemongrass (optional)

Directions:

1. Place the pork belly skin down in an oven safe dish (baking tray etc.). If you are using a small (under 1kg or very thin) pork belly, cover the tray with tinfoil. For larger cuts, leave it open. Place the dish in a cold oven and turn it up to the highest temperature. Make sure the oven is set to bake, not grill. Cook for 30 minutes.
2. Once the time is up, remove it from the oven and flip it over. Turn the oven down to 350F/180C. I usually do the skin down step in the same casserole/baking dish that I will cook the pork belly in. This will mean that some of the salt on the skin will end up in the cooking liquid - you want this to happen. The next part of the cook is covered, so make sure it has a lid or that you can cover it in foil. Add a bit more coarse salt to your skin, being careful not to let too much salt fall into the dish.
3. Add your red wine, garlic, beef stock in boiling water, thyme and lemongrass. The liquid should cover the meat but NOT touch the skin at all. If the pork belly is a funny shape, there's a chance that some of the meat will stick out of the cooking liquid - this is fine. The liquid must just not touch the skin.
4. Put the lid on and place the dish in the oven carefully. I usually cook my pork bellies for 1.5 to 2 hours. It will depend on the size and what you want to do with it. If you have a small cut, check the meat at 40 minutes and then every 20 minutes thereafter. To make pulled pork, it needs a longer cooking time. To make slices of pork belly, it will need less time (probably around 1.5 hours) to cook through but not fall apart. Use a fork, or cut into the centre, to check if it's cooked. Remove from the oven once done. The skin doesn't look appetising at this point, don't worry, that gets fixed.
5. For sliced pork belly with the crackling attached: slice the meat into the required size. Place it back under the grill until the crackling is crispy. Watch it carefully, it's easy to push it too far.
6. For pulled pork: with a sharp knife, carefully remove the skin (with a layer of fat). If the skin is in one big piece, cut it into strips or squares. Place the skin on a baking tray under the grill under crispy. Watch it carefully, it's easy to push it too far. While the crackling is cooking, shred the meat with two forks. Serve with a spoonful of the liquid left at the bottom of the dish.

