

MY HUSBAND COOKS:

A TASTY LOOK AT THE FOOD HE MAKES AND I EAT.

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Braised Pork Shoulder with Raisins and New Potatoes

Ingredients:

4lbs boneless pork shoulder
3 lbs. red potatoes (peeled, cut into 3 inch pieces)
1 qt. chicken stock
12 oz. Belgian Strong Ale (pref. golden/dark)
2 medium sweet yellow onions
6 cloves garlic
3 shallots
8 sprigs fresh thyme
1 cup golden raisins
1/2 cup bourbon
olive oil

crust:

1/4 cup pecans (crushed)
1/4 cup bread crumbs
3 Tbsp. butter (melted)
zest of a lemon
salt
pepper

brine:

1 gallon water
3/4 cup salt
1/4 cup light brown sugar
15 peppercorns

Directions:

1. Divide the pork shoulder in two equal pieces. Mix together the brine ingredients in a large container. Once the salt and sugar is dissolved, or close to, add the pork shoulder and cover the container. There are benefits to brining for as little as 20 min. However, best results is to refrigerate overnight. If the shoulder has an excess amount of fat, trim off.
2. In a medium sauce pan, boil 1 quart of water. Add the raisin and simmer for 5 min. Drain the raisins. Move the raisins to another container. Add the bourbon. Cover for as long as 1 hour, or refrigerate overnight. The raisins should look plump.

3. Remove the leaves from 2 sprigs of thyme. Add the leaves, bread crumbs, pecans, and butter to a small dish. Season to taste. Cover and refrigerate until firm.

4. Preheat oven to 325F.

5. Drain the raisins and reserve the bourbon. Place a Dutch oven or heavy pot over medium-high heat. Add enough olive oil to lightly coat the bottom. Once hot add the pork shoulder pieces, shallots, garlic and 3 sprigs of thyme. Sear the pork shoulder on all sides. Watch the shallots and garlic and remove if they appear to burn. Once the pork is browned, remove and set aside. Add the reserved bourbon to deglaze. **WARNING** be careful, the bourbon may ignite. This is not a bad thing, just be careful. Once the bourbon is nearly evaporated, add the beer, stock, and any removed garlic, or shallots. Bring to a boil and let simmer for 15 min. Strain the liquid, and skim off any obvious extra fat. You are making a flavorful stock to use later.

6. In the pot, back over medium heat, now brown the onions. Then return the meat and cooking stock to the pot, and add the raisins and remaining thyme. Place in the oven. It will need to braise for about 2 to 2 ½ hours. The meat should be extremely tender. About half way through the cooking, add the potatoes and cook until they are easily pierced with paring knife.

7. Remove the potatoes and pork from the liquid. Cover with heavy foil and set aside. Strain the liquid and place in a pot to reduce. This is the moment of truth for this dish. You want to boil down the cooking stock to nearly a syrup. Do not season the sauce until you are done. There may be enough salt from the meat that seasoning too early will hurt the flavor. Reducing could take up to 30 to 40 min. The signals it is done will be the liquid will change from a pale apple cider looking color, to a dark caramel color. The liquid will also begin to bubble similar like making caramel, meaning lots of small tight bubbles the cover the top of the liquid. Finally, it should be thick and coat a spoon completely without easily dripping when turned upside down. Another trick to check for doneness is to place a little on a plate and see how easily it moves when the plate is held perpendicular to the floor. It should be slow.

8. Preheat the broiler. Press the crust against the top of the pork shoulder pieces and then place on a sheet tray. Run under the broiler until golden brown. Slice the shoulder, serve with the potatoes, coat gently with sauce, and add a few fresh raisins as garnish.

NOTE: In making this recipe, I used both Prantster from North Coast Brewing Company and Gulden Drak, a classic Belgian version, on separate occasions with great results. Other examples of this style are Chimay Grande Reserve (the blue bottle), Gouden Carlos, and Brooklyn Brewery's Local 1.