

IBÉRICO PORK WITH CHARD MISO AND ZUCCHINI

For some years I have been championing acorn-fed Black Foot Ibérico pork, native to Portugal and Spain. Some guests have heard of it, but it is still news to many just how good the fresh meat is: it has a complex and sweet nutty flavor that is hard to rival. The amazing pigs that we cook at the Firehouse—the same pigs that are used to make the famous Ibérico ham—are raised and cared for by my dear friend Manuel Maldonado and they spend their life eating acorns on the border of Portugal and Spain. They don't care about nationality and they don't have a passport, they just worry about finding the best acorns. The *presa* is the cut from between the top of the shoulder and the beginning of the loin, and is a beautiful, tender cut.

The meat, which you can find online or from a specialty Spanish supplier, needs to be cooked slowly and gently to medium-rare doneness, and should be well rested before serving. I promise you that this will be a revelation!

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

for the chard miso:

10 ounces/300 g grilled zucchini, finely diced

7 ounces/200 g chard, blanched in heavily salted water, dried, split into stems and leaves, and finely chopped

½ bunch chives, finely snipped

½ bunch mint, leaves finely chopped

2 tablespoons dark miso paste

2 tablespoons toasted black sesame seeds, crushed with ½ teaspoon salt

Juice of ½ lemon

4 tablespoons chive oil (see recipe below)

4 tablespoons mint oil (see recipe below)

for the zucchini:

8 baby zucchini, halved lengthwise

Grapeseed oil

A 1¾-pound/800-g whole piece Ibérico pork presa (if you can't find any, very good-quality pastured pork would work, but it won't produce the same excellence as the presa)

If using a charcoal or wood-fired grill: log of wood (birchwood, oak, cherry, or apple)

If using a pan: 1 tablespoon grapeseed oil

8 tablespoons/65 g unsalted butter, melted

Maldon sea salt, to season

Extra virgin olive oil, to serve

MAKE THE MISO

Mix the diced zucchini and chopped chard with the chives and mint in a bowl, then add the miso paste and the crushed black sesame seeds. Mix and adjust the seasoning to taste, then let it sit for 30 to 40 minutes at room temperature in a covered container.

BRINE THE ZUCCHINI

Place the halved zucchini in a 10 percent salt brine (10 percent salt to 100 percent water) for 20 minutes, then drain and pat dry.

GRILL THE PRESA

Cut the *presa* into 4 equal-sized pieces and let them come to room temperature before you start cooking.

If you have a charcoal or wood-fired grill, smoke the meat slowly over a smoking log for 45 minutes, turning it frequently. Transfer the smoked meat to a hot broiler and cook it for 45 to 60 seconds on each side. Between each side, remove the meat from the heat and let it rest for 5 to 10 minutes. Repeat the broiling and resting process 4 to 5 times until the meat is grilled on all sides and reaches an internal temperature of 118°F/48°C on a probe thermometer. Brush the meat all over with melted butter, including the milk solids, and season with salt.

If you don't have a charcoal or wood-fired grill, heat the grapeseed oil in a heavy-bottomed pan over high heat, swirling it around so that the surface is well-greased. Once the oil is very hot, sear the pieces of meat on all sides, giving each side 45 seconds of direct heat, then removing it to let it rest for 5 minutes, before turning it and searing another side. Repeat the searing and resting process 3 to 4 times until the meat reaches an internal temperature of 118°F/48°C on a probe thermometer and is seared on all sides. The meat will continue to cook off the heat, so stop searing the meat once it reaches 108°F/42°C, then let it slowly reach 118°F/48°C as it rests. Brush the meat all over with melted butter, including the milk solids, and season with salt.

SEAR THE ZUCCHINI & WARM THE MISO

Gently warm the miso in a saucepan (don't cook it!), add the lemon juice, adjust the seasoning to taste, and mix in the chive oil and mint oil.

Heat a little grapeseed oil in a nonstick frying pan and sear the brined zucchini halves, flesh side down, then turn them over and cook them on the skin side. This process should take no more than 3 minutes. Transfer them straight to 4 warm serving plates.

SERVE

Quickly flash-fry the *presa* on both sides in the same pan you used to sear the zucchini, then carve. Arrange 2 to 3 tablespoons of the chard miso in the center of each plate. Place slices of pork neatly on top, then 4 of the seared zucchini. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil, sprinkle with sea salt, and serve immediately.

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HOW TO MAKE AN HERB OIL

I love making herb oils. They add a really nice layer of fragrance to salads, sauces, relishes, and finished dishes. They are fun to make and are a great pantry item. For every 3/4 cup/200 ml oil (we use grapeseed oil), use 7 ounces/200 g chopped herbs (chives, parsley, cilantro, green onion, basil, or wild garlic) and a pinch of salt. Blend all the ingredients in a high-powered blender or the bowl of a food processor until the mixture is smooth and emulsified. Transfer the blended herbs and oil to a small saucepan over low heat and cook gently, stirring frequently so that it doesn't burn. As you stir, you'll notice the oil particles start separating from the herbs, and the oil will gently start changing color and getting darker. Once the oil has completely separated from the herbs and the small particles of leaves are looking quite dark, remove from the heat, and strain the oil through a very fine cheesecloth or muslin into a bowl set over ice. The dark green oil will keep for up to 2 weeks in the fridge. Add to salads, simple fish, and vegetables.

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