

COCHINITA PIBIL

PIT-SMOKED PORK IN *ACHIOTE* MARINADE

True *pibil* dishes (as the name suggests) are cooked in a *pib* – a hand-dug pit in the ground lined with fiery coals and hot stones. *Pibes* also employ a roof that seals up the hole, which is then covered with earth. Meats cooked in a *pib* are wrapped in banana leaves, which seals in juices and flavor. The secret of the *pib* is that its roof locks in heat, steam and smoke, which makes *pibil* meats so tender and succulent, and gives them their smoky flavor. For this dish, we have created a stovetop method for achieving a similar result. We have also modernized the recipe somewhat by brining the pork for a few hours, and by using other cuts of pork instead of a whole *cochinita* (suckling pig!) You may also use a crown rib roast or thick cut chops instead of the cuts mentioned here.

10 SERVINGS

☞ BRINE THE PORK ☞

- 4 quarts (4 liters) cold water
- 1/2 cup (130g) salt
- 1/2 cup (130g) sugar
- 1 cup (250ml) juice of *naranja agria* (Also known as sour orange or Seville orange. Substitute: 2 parts fresh lime juice, 1 part each fresh orange juice and grapefruit juice)
- 5 whole allspice berries
- 1 tsp. (5ml) black peppercorns
- 2 lb. (1k) pork loin, rump or leg

- 8 Tbs. (120ml) *recado rojo (achiote paste)**
- 8 Tbs. (120ml) juice of *naranja agria* (See above for substitute)
- 1 Tbs. (15ml) dried Mexican oregano leaves (or 1 tsp/5 ml ground), toasted
- 1 tsp. (5ml) cumin, toasted
- 5 large cloves garlic, peeled and charred
- 1 tsp. (5ml) black peppercorns
- 1 tsp. (5ml) sea salt

- Banana leaves, ribs removed and reserved for ties (Substitute: kitchen twine)
- 2 green bell peppers, thinly sliced
- 1 large white onion, thinly sliced
- 2 large Roma tomatoes, sliced
- 1 bunch *epazote*, separated into leaves

- 2 Tbs. (10g) wood smoking chips, preferably *mesquite*

*Available in Mexican grocers or the ethnic sections of supermarkets

STEP 1 DISSOLVE THE SALT AND SUGAR in the water. Add the juice. Crush allspice and peppercorns in a mortar and pestle and add with pork to the brine; refrigerate 12 hours or overnight. After the brining process, drain and rinse pork under cold water and pat dry. Discard the brining solution.

☞ PREPARE THE MARINADE ☞

STEP 2 DISSOLVE THE *ACHIOTE* PASTE in the juice. Use more juice if necessary to achieve the consistency of thick cream.

STEP 3 IN A *MOLCAJETE* or mortar and pestle, coarsely grind the oregano, cumin, garlic, peppercorns and salt. Add to the *recado* mixture and stir thoroughly to incorporate. Pour over pork and spread to coat thoroughly.

☞ WRAP THE PORK ☞

STEP 4 PLACE PORK in the center of one or more banana leaves, according to size of the cut(s). (For chops you may wrap individually.) Garnish with slices of the vegetables and the *epazote* leaves. Wrap the meat with the banana leaf as you would a package, and tie with the reserved ribs or kitchen twine to secure. You may cook immediately or refrigerate overnight. Allow to come to room temperature before proceeding.

☞ SMOKE THE PORK ☞

STEP 5 FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS for stovetop smoking. Smoke until a meat thermometer registers 160° Fahrenheit (71° Celsius), about 1 hour. Off heat, remove cover and let stand for 10-15 minutes before serving or shredding. Serve with *Cebollas Encurtidas*.

STOVETOP “PIB” SMOKING INSTRUCTIONS

- **Large cast-iron Dutch oven or roasting pan with lid** (*NOTE: Because of the intense heat required for this dish, enameled iron cookware is not recommended.*)
- **Heavy-duty aluminum foil**
- **10-12 inch (25-30cm) cake rack** (*must fit snugly in bottom of pot*)

✧ PREPARE THE POT ✧

STEP 1 WORKING WITH THE DUTCH OVEN OR ROASTING PAN, line sides and bottom with foil, using two or three pieces if necessary. Leave at least 6 inches (15cm) of foil extending beyond the edge of the pot. Using a fork or sharp object, cut and tear away a small hole in the foil at the center of the bottom about 3 inches (7.5cm) in diameter to expose the pot's surface underneath. Line underside of lid with aluminum foil and crimp tightly around edges. Create “feet” for the cake rack with balls of foil. The rack should rest about 1^{1/2} inches (4cm) off the inside bottom surface of the pot.

✧ PREHEAT THE POT ✧

STEP 2 PLACE THE POT without cover or cakerack over highest heat on stovetop. Heat for 10 minutes. Have banana-wrapped meat at hand. When pan is pre-heated, place smoking chips called for in recipe on the pan's surface where you cut away the foil. Immediately place rack at bottom of pot. Place meat packet(s) onto rack, spacing evenly and allowing some space around them so that steam and smoke can circulate. Put lid in place, and crimp edges of foil all around to create a tight seal. Cook according to recipe instructions.