

POC CHUC

WOOD FIRE-GRILLED PORK CUTLETS

The more correct transliteration for this dish is *póok chíuk*, which in Maya means “roasted or grilled (*póok*) over wood coals (*chíuk*).” When you order *poc chuc* at a Yucatecan restaurant, you can be certain you will receive pork, although there are even traditional recipes featuring chicken or fish. The one essential is fast grilling over a searingly hot wood or wood carbon fire. The ancient Maya – who controlled salt production throughout much of Mesoamerica – salted most of the proteins they found to eat, such as fish, deer, peccary and so on, in order to preserve them for future use. When the Spanish introduced the domesticated pig, the Maya applied to the new animal their ancient practice of salting. Before consuming the meat, it had to be rinsed of the salt and “refreshed” to improve the taste. Another Spanish introduction – *naranja agria*, or sour orange – was soon incorporated for this purpose. Only some of the oldest recipes still feature the entire process – salting the meat first, then rinsing it with sour orange juice. Our update substitutes traditional salting and drying with a brine solution, which is quicker, helps keep meat moist and also contributes a lot of flavor. *Poc chuc* is obviously of ancient origins. The clue is its lack of elaboration: an assortment of simple ingredients – meat, tomatoes, onions and *chiles* – is processed quickly over the flame, or more traditionally, directly on the hot coals. Follow the instructions for the typical accompaniments *Cebollas Asadas* and *Chiltomate*, but streamline the process by using the same hot coals for the vegetables that you will use for the pork. Serve with *Arroz Amarillo* and *Frijol Colorado*.

10 SERVINGS

☞ BRINE THE PORK ☞

- **3 lbs. (1.4 k) pork loin**
- **4 quarts (4 liters) cold water**
- **1/2 cup (130g) salt**
- **1/2 cup (130g) sugar**
- **5 whole allspice berries**
- **1 tsp. (5ml) black peppercorns**

STEP 1 DISSOLVE THE SALT AND SUGAR in the water. Crush allspice and peppercorns in a mortar and pestle and add with pork to the brine; refrigerate at least 8 hours or overnight.

STEP 2 REMOVE THE PORK FROM THE BRINE, rinse under cold water, drain and pat dry. Discard the brining solution. Slice the loin into 10 equal portions each weighing about 5 oz. (125g). Working one or two slices at a time, place the pork between two layers of waxed paper; pound with a wooden mallet to flatten until thin, about 1/4 inch (.5cm) thick. Finish pounding all pieces. Place pork in a sealable plastic bag and refrigerate while you complete the next steps.

☞ FINISH THE PORK & ACCOMPANIMENTS ☞

- **1 tsp. (15ml) oregano Yucateco**, toasted (Substitute; 1/2 tsp./7.5ml Mexican oregano)
- **1 tsp. (15ml) black peppercorns**
- **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)
- **6 cloves garlic, peeled and charred**

STEP 3 GRIND OREGANO AND PEPPER in a mortar and pestle or spice mill. Pour juice into a blender jar; add spices and garlic. Process 1 minute. Add this mixture to the pork in the plastic bag; marinate at room temperature for 30 minutes.

STEP 4 MEANWHILE, LIGHT THE GRILL. Wood coals such as mesquite provide the best flavor. After the coals are well lit, distribute them evenly across the bottom of the grill. Continue, following the recipes for *Chiltomate* and *Cebollas Asadas*.

STEP 5 SEAR MEAT QUICKLY on both sides; cover and allow to smoke for 5 minutes. Transfer to a platter. Serve with warm corn *tortillas* and the accompaniments noted above.