

Carnitas



This was the last dish I cooked in San Francisco. It's a Mexican classic and one I'd had many times at local taquerias. You can find all sorts of recipes for carnitas, involving different meats, flavourings and cooking methods. This pork 'n' lard version is the real deal. My method follows that of the chef at Mexico DF restaurant, who shared it after we'd devoured several pounds of the stuff. It is meltingly tender on the inside, crispy on the outside and wonderfully porky. You will be in pig heaven.

Serves: 4

Active time: 30 mins

Total time: start at least one day ahead...

approx 680g (1½ lbs) well-marbled pork shoulder, cut into 1½" cubes

salt and pepper

approx 12 dried bay leaves

approx 2 litres (8+ cups) rendered lard (pork fat)

3 plump garlic cloves, peeled and slightly crushed

To serve:

8 fresh corn tortillas (the slightly smaller, fatter ones are nice)

sour cream

a selection of salsas, such as:

tomato, onion, lime and red chilli salsa, and/or

roasted tomatillo, coriander (cilantro) and green chilli salsa, and/or

tinned chipotle chillies in adobo sauce, and/or

guacamole

1. The day before, grind half the bay leaves in an electric spice mill or with a pestle and mortar and mix this with some salt and pepper. Generously season the meat with this mix on all sides. Rub it in a bit, lay on a few more bay leaves for good luck, then leave in the fridge overnight, covered.

2. Bring the meat to room temperature. Melt the lard in a saucepan over a low heat. Add meat, garlic and a few bay leaves. Bring to a *very* gentle simmer, and cook like this for 3-4 hours, or until the meat is totally tender and starting to fall apart. It should barely bubble. Stir occasionally to prevent meat sticking. Make sure all meat is fully submerged all the time.
3. Allow meat to cool in fat. The fat will solidify around it. If you want, you can then refrigerate it overnight. If you want to keep it for longer, lift meat out of fat while it's still hot, strain fat through a fine sieve to remove all debris, then pour fat over meat in a suitable container (one that can later be placed directly on a low heat or in a low oven to re-melt fat), leaving behind any meaty liquid at the bottom, and making sure meat is totally submerged in fat before chilling. This way it should keep in the fridge for weeks, and will be all the better for it.
4. When it's nearly time to eat, melt the pork 'n' lard mix over a low heat. Carefully remove the meat to a plate with a slotted spoon. If you had not previously strained the fat to remove debris, do so now. Return fat to saucepan and heat it on high until it's so hot that when a piece of meat is lowered in, it immediately sizzles. Deep-fry meat in batches. Each batch should only take a few minutes. The meat is done when it is nutty brown and crispy on the outside (but still juicy and tender on the inside). Remove meat to paper towels, then serve immediately while still hot, or keep in a dish covered in foil in a low-ish oven to keep warm.
5. Serve with warmed soft tortillas and salsas, as you wish. This quantity should make around 8 tacos. Delicious.

