

Christmas Pork

A staple on the menu for Christmas is ham. Unfortunately ham is loaded with fat, calories, salt and nitrates.

So with this holiday recipe, chef and author Rocco DiSiprito decided not to use ham, but to cook and season a healthier pork loin in a way that reminds him of ham.

Ham comes from the hind leg of a pig, from the shank to the hip. Pork loin comes from the top back of the pig, making it one of the leanest cuts of pork available and comparable to chicken breast. Pork loin also has other advantages - it's relatively inexpensive, easy to carve and pairs beautifully with pretty much any kind of sweet glaze.

The biggest gift in this Christmas dish is how much you save in total calories. This dish has 313 calories and 8 grams of fat per serving. Now, that is a sign of happy holidays!

Rocco DiSiprito is author of the 'Now Eat This!' and 'Now Eat This! Diet' cookbooks.

Tip: Be sure to buy a pork loin that does not have any added water or tenderising solution added to it.

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(Servings: 8)

When making the glaze, taste and add packets of stevia sweetener until you are satisfied with the flavour. Stevia brands vary widely in sweetness, so start with one packet and taste as you go.

Start to finish: 1 1/2 hours (30 minutes active)

3-pound fresh pork loin, trimmed of all visible fat
8 whole cloves
1/2 gallon cold water
1/2 cup kosher salt, plus extra
6 sprigs fresh thyme, divided
1tbs olive oil, divided
2 medium turnips, peeled and cut into 1-inch wedges
Ground black pepper
1 cup pomegranate juice, divided
21/2 tsp arrowroot
Packets stevia sweetener powder, to taste
1/8 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp chopped fresh tarragon
1/4 cup pomegranate seeds
1/2 cup coarse ground or stone ground mustard
1/4 cup prepared horseradish

Method

Heat the oven to 350F. Place the pork on a cutting board. Using a sharp knife, make shallow diagonal criss-cross cuts over the top and bottom of the roast at 1-inch intervals. Use a metal skewer or meat fork to poke about 60 holes over the surface of the roast, making sure to push the skewer all the way to the centre of the roast.

Insert the cloves into the intersections of the cuts on the top of the pork. Set aside.

In a large oven-safe pot, combine the water, 1/2 cup of salt and 4 sprigs of the thyme. Stir to dissolve the salt. Gently submerge the pork in the water and cover with the lid or foil. Place in the oven and bake for 1 hour, or until the pork registers 145F at the centre.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan over medium-high, heat 1/2 tbs of the oil. Add the turnips and toss to coat evenly with oil. Season with salt and pepper, then place in the oven and roast for 40 to 50 minutes, or until the turnips are tender and nicely browned, stirring once or twice.

Pick the leaves off of the remaining 2 sprigs of thyme and add to the turnips. Toss to coat, then set aside.
In a small bowl, stir together 1tbs of the pomegranate juice and the arrowroot until the arrowroot is dissolved.

Pour the remaining pomegranate juice into a small saucepan. Add one packet of stevia and the cinnamon and heat to simmering. Whisk in the arrowroot mixture. Continue to cook and stir for about 30 seconds, or until the sauce is thickened. Taste and add stevia as needed for desired sweetness. Set aside.

Remove the pork from the cooking liquid and pat dry with paper towels. Heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat and add the remaining 1/2 tbs of olive oil. Once the oil is smoking, add the pork roast and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, or until browned on both sides, turning once.

Remove the pork from the pan.

Add half of the pomegranate glaze to the pan and reduce the heat to medium. Add the pork back to the pan with the glaze and turn to coat the meat completely. Remove the pork from the pan and place on a cutting board. Add the turnips, half of the pomegranate seeds and the tarragon to the glaze in the sauté pan. Cook and stir for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the turnips are heated through and coated with the glaze.

Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Whisk the mustard and horseradish into the remaining half of the pomegranate glaze and pour into a small serving dish.

Remove the cloves from the pork, then thinly slice the pork. Place the pork slices on a large platter. Add the turnips to the platter around the pork and sprinkle with the remaining pomegranate seeds. Serve with the mustard and horseradish sauce.

Nutrition information per serving (values are rounded to the nearest whole number): 313 calories; 8 g fat (24 percent calories from fat) (2 g saturated); 107 mg cholesterol; 11 g carbohydrate; 39 g protein; 1 g fibre; 1,421 mg sodium.