

## Herb-Scented Tuscan Pork Roast

From Fall Menu for A Splendid Table, September 2002

Adapted from A New Way to Cook (Sally Schneider Artisan, 2001 - Copyright 2001)

At Peggy Markel's cooking school, La Cucina al Focolore, 18 miles southeast of Florence, a pork roast is boned & seasoned with sage-&rosemary salt, then place on a rack of the bones, which add flavor to the meat & pan juices. As it roasts, it's basted with white wine, both to build up a caramelized surface & to provide a pan sauce, a technique used for all manner of roasts in Tuscany. My American adaptation of this recipe is to cover the roast with thin slices of pancetta, which give it the juiciness & savor of Italian pork. If you ask the butcher to saw through the chine bone that holds the ribs together, the ribs will roast into a rack of delectable spare ribs, which you can cut apart to nibble on. (Bear in mind that, since ribs are quite rich, they'll up the fat & calorie count) This is a wonderful dinner party dish, because it takes so little work for such a dramatic effect. It is also delicious cold.

- One 7-lb pork loin, boned (have the butcher do this, reserving the bones; see Headnote), fat trimmed
- Tuscan Herb Salt (recipe follows)
- Four 10"-long rosemary branches
- 1 1/2 tsp kosher salt
- 3 oz (4-5 thin slices) lean pancetta
- 1 tsp olive oil
- 2 C dry white wine
- Kosher salt & freshly ground black pepper

Pat pork loin dry. Using knife-sharpening steel or long-handled wooden spoon, pierce a hole lengthwise through center of loin. Working from either end of loin, use your fingers to stuff all but 1 TBS of the herb salt into hole. Insert 1 rosemary branch into each end to form a tassel. Mix remaining herb salt with 1 1/2 tsp salt & rub it all over roast.

Arrange pancetta slices, slightly overlapping each other, down length of roast. Arrange 2 remaining rosemary sprigs on top. Tie roast at 1" intervals with cotton string for a neat shape. Transfer to platter, cover with plastic wrap & refrigerate 2-24 hours. Bring to room temperature for 1 hour before roasting.

Preheat oven to 450°F. Place rack of rib bones curved-side down in shallow roasting pan. Pat roast dry with paper towels & rub with olive oil. Place roast on rack - roast 15 minutes. Remove pan from oven, turn roast over & baste with few TBS of wine. Return roast to oven & reduce temperature to 350°F. Cook 1 1/4 - 1 1/2 hours longer, turning roast & basting with wine every 20 minutes; reserve 1/2 C wine for the sauce. The roast is done when an instant-read thermometer registers 145°F.

Transfer roast to platter & pour pan juices into measuring cup. If meat on rack of bones is still pink & you wish to serve the ribs, place on baking sheet & return to oven for about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, place roasting pan over 2 burners over moderate heat; when it starts to sizzle, add reserved 1/2 C wine & cook 2 minutes, scraping up drippings from pan bottom. Add to pan juices in the measuring cup; let the fat rise to the surface, about 5 minutes. Skim off fat & season sauce with salt & pepper.

Remove strings & carve roast into thin slices. If serving the ribs, remove rack from pan & cut through ribs. Arrange meat & ribs on platter & serve pan juices on the side.

You can wrap & tie the pork loin up to 1 day ahead; cover/refrigerate. Bring to room temperature for 1 hour before roasting.

**Tuscan Herb Salt** (Makes about 1/4 C)

In Tuscany, this vibrantly flavored herb salt seasons all kinds of roasts, from pork to guinea hen. While it's best fresh, you can also let it dry out in an uncovered container—the salt will preserve the herbs' & garlic's clear flavor—to use as a versatile seasoning. I toss some with sautéed vegetables like green beans or potatoes. You can also vary the combination of herbs, using thyme or savory in the same way. You'll need about 1/4 C herb leaves in all.

- 1 garlic clove
- 1 TBS kosher salt
- 1 small bunch fresh sage (about 30 leaves)
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary

On cutting board, mince garlic with salt. Place herbs in a mound & coarsely chop them. Add garlic salt & chop them together to make a coarse rub. Use salt right away, or let it dry, uncovered, in a bowl for a few days. The dried salt rub can be stored indefinitely in a clean dry jar.

Serves 8

Fall Menu for A Splendid Table

Bruschetta of Wild Mushrooms

Herb-Scented Tuscan Pork Roast

Roasted Winter Squash Puree

Rustic Rosemary Apple Tart

Copyright © 2002 Lynne Rossetto Kasper