



Pan-Seared Pork Tenderloin

How could we add flavor and juiciness to this lean, dry, often overcooked cut of meat?

The Problem: The tenderloin cut, being incredibly lean, dries out quickly and is virtually flavorless on its own.

The Goal: Winter weather not always permitting the use of an outdoor grill, we set out to discover a flavor-boosting alternative to the charcoal fire for this quick-cooking roast.

The Solution: A marriage of stovetop and oven cooking produced the best final product. Seasoned with salt and pepper and lightly coated with olive oil, the meat is first seared to golden-brown perfection on the stovetop, then cooked through in a 400-degree oven, until reaching an internal temperature of 135 to 140 degrees. After a 10-minute rest, the temperature climbed to the desired range of 145 to 150, and the meat retained lots of juices. A pan-sauce seemed a natural to add flavor to the roast, as the browned bits, or fond, left behind in the pan made the perfect base. In the 10 or so minutes that the meat spent in the oven, there was time to reduce vinegar or wine down to a glaze or to caramelize onions and garlic in the empty pan. While the meat rested, the sauce could be finished with fresh herbs or mustard or butter. The end result: a richly flavored sauce fit to accompany our golden-crusted, juicy pork tenderloins, and all in less than 30 minutes.

Pan-Seared Oven-Roasted Pork Tenderloin

"Enhanced" pork--pork that has been injected with water, salt, and sodium phosphate--does not brown well owing to the extra moisture. We prefer natural pork tenderloins that have not been injected. Because two are cooked at once, tenderloins larger than 1 pound apiece will not fit comfortably in a 12-inch skillet. Time permitting, season the tenderloins up to 30 minutes before cooking; the seasonings will better penetrate the meat. The recipe will work in a nonstick or a traditional (not nonstick) skillet. A pan sauce can be made while the tenderloins rest (recipes follow); if you intend to make a sauce, make sure to prepare all of the sauce ingredients before cooking the pork.

Serves 4 to 6

2 pork tenderloins (12 to 16 ounces each) trimmed of fat and silver skin
1 1/4 teaspoons kosher salt
3/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 teaspoon vegetable oil

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position; heat oven to 400 degrees. Sprinkle tenderloins evenly with salt and pepper; rub seasoning into meat. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until smoking. Place both tenderloins in skillet; cook until well browned, 1 to 1 1/2 minutes. Using tongs, rotate tenderloins 1/4 turn; cook until well browned, 45 to 60 seconds. Repeat until all sides are browned. Transfer tenderloins to rimmed baking sheet and place in oven (reserve skillet if making pan sauce); roast until internal temperature registers 135 to 140 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 10 to 16 minutes. (Begin pan sauce, if making, while meat roasts.)

2. Transfer tenderloins to cutting board and tent loosely with foil (continue with pan sauce, if making); let rest until internal temperature registers 145 to 150 degrees, 8 to 10 minutes. Cut tenderloins crosswise into 1/2-inch-thick slices, arrange on platter or individual plates, and spoon sauce (if using) over; serve immediately.

Dried Cherry-Port Sauce with Onions and Marmalade

Makes enough to sauce 2 tenderloins

1 teaspoon vegetable oil
1 large onion , *halved and sliced 1/2 inch thick (about 1 1/2 cups)*
3/4 cup port
3/4 cup dried cherries
2 tablespoons orange marmalade
3 tablespoons unsalted butter , *cut into 3 pieces*
table salt and ground black pepper

1. Immediately after placing pork in oven, add oil to still-hot skillet, swirl to coat, and set skillet over medium-high heat; add onion and cook, stirring frequently, until softened and browned about the edges, 5 to 7 minutes (if drippings are browning too quickly, add 2 tablespoons water and scrape up browned bits with wooden spoon). Set skillet aside off heat.

2. While pork is resting, set skillet over medium-high heat and add port and cherries; simmer, scraping up browned bits with wooden spoon, until mixture is slightly thickened, 4 to 6 minutes. Add any accumulated pork juices and continue to simmer until thickened and reduced to about 1/3 cup, 2 to 4 minutes longer. Off heat, whisk in orange marmalade and butter, one piece at a time. Adjust seasonings with salt and pepper.

Garlicky Lime Sauce with Cilantro

This assertive sauce is based on a Mexican sauce called mojo de ajo. A rasp-style grater is the best way to break down the garlic to a fine paste. Another option is to put the garlic through a press and then finish mincing it to a paste with a knife. If your garlic cloves contain green sprouts or shoots, remove the sprouts before grating--their flavor is bitter and hot. The initial cooking of the garlic off heat will prevent scorching.

Makes enough to sauce 2 tenderloins

10 cloves of garlic , *peeled and grated to fine paste on rasp-style grater (about 2 tablespoons)*
2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 teaspoons light brown sugar
3 tablespoons lime juice from 2 limes
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives
4 tablespoons unsalted butter , *cut into 4 pieces*
table salt and ground black pepper

1. Immediately after placing pork in oven, mix garlic paste with water in small bowl. Add oil to still-hot skillet and swirl to coat; add garlic paste and cook with skillet's residual heat, scraping up browned bits with wooden spoon, until sizzling subsides, about 2 minutes. Set skillet over low heat and continue cooking, stirring frequently, until garlic is sticky, 8 to 10 minutes; set skillet aside off heat.

2. While pork is resting, set skillet over medium heat; add pepper flakes and sugar to skillet and cook until sticky and sugar is dissolved, about 1 minute. Add lime juice, cilantro, and chives; simmer to blend flavors, 1 to 2 minutes. Add any accumulated pork juices and simmer 1 minute longer. Off heat, whisk in butter, one piece at a time. Adjust seasonings with salt and pepper.