

Three Quick



Try it grilled with mustard and rosemary, sautéed with spiced tomatoes, or roasted with apples and herbs

Methods for Pork Tenderloin

BY RAJI JALLEPALLI

At my restaurant, I serve a four-course dinner menu that changes nightly. Often I choose to serve pork as the main dish, specifically pork tenderloin. I favor the tenderloin over other cuts of pork because it cooks quickly, renders little fat, and its subtle flavor and buttery-soft texture complement my lighter-styled accompaniments, such as vegetable purées in place of gravy. What I like best about pork tenderloin, however, is its versatility. The cut is delicate enough to showcase subtle flavorings, such as a simple rub of ginger, but it's hearty enough to stand up to a peppery spice rub or a curry-based sauce.

People are sometimes surprised to see pork tenderloin on my menu because in India, where I was born, many people don't eat pork. But because my cooking is not Indian, but a fusion of Indian flavors and classic technique, and because I have no religious objections to pork, and—most important—

A pairing of pork and pasta. Slices of the honey-mustard-rosemary pork top pasta tossed with steamed vegetables for a dish full of flavor and color.

The scent of rosemary fills the kitchen as this butterflied pork tenderloin gets quickly grilled.

"What I like best about pork is its versatility," says author Raji Jallepalli, right.





Be careful when trimming the tenderloin so you don't cut away any precious meat. Use a sharp knife to cut and your fingers to gently pull off any thick pieces of fat.

Pull away any thin membranes and cut the silverskin cleanly from the meat. The silverskin shrinks when heated and might cause the tenderloin to cook unevenly.



because the pork tenderloin produced in America is so tender, moist, and juicy, I feature it regularly.

I cook and serve the tenderloin in different ways, sautéing it one night and presenting it as medallions atop a spicy vegetable purée, marinating and grilling it another, or roasting it to serve with a fruit chutney. Though I think pork tenderloin is special enough to serve at my restaurant, it's so quick and easy to prepare that you can easily serve it at home.

A LITTLE TRIMMING, A LITTLE SEASONING, AND IT'S READY TO GO

The tenderloin, which is part of the loin, comes from a well-protected part of the pig, located under the backbone on the inside of the animal's ribs. In general, those muscles that see little movement are most tender, and the tenderloin hardly moves at all. Long, thin, boneless, and covered with little fat, the tenderloin may have a slightly less intense flavor than some bone-in cuts, but as its name implies, this cut is the most tender. Pork tenderloin is a more expensive cut, averaging \$6 per pound, but because it has no bone and little fat, there's very little waste.

Look for color and consistency when buying pork. The flesh should be moist and firm and a deep pink, not gray or red; the fat should be creamy white. Avoid very wet packages, which may signal that the pork was handled badly.

Use a sharp knife to trim the fat. Because pork tenderloin can be expensive, keep as much of it intact as possible. When trimming the fat, pull on it until you can separate it from the meat, and then use a very sharp knife to cut away the fat. The silverskin—a thin, tough, translucent membrane that's somewhat silver in color—covers much of the tenderloin. It tends to shrink when heated and can cause the meat to cook unevenly, so remove it as

well. Use the tip of a sharp knife to get under the silverskin and then gently pull it away from the meat with your fingers. Use the knife to cut the silverskin away from the meat where it is stubborn.

Any way you slice it, it's still delicious. You can cook the tenderloin whole or butterfly it to get a flatter piece of meat. To butterfly, hold the knife so the blade is parallel to the cutting board. Make a lengthwise slit down the tenderloin without cutting all the way through. When you open the tenderloin like a book, the meat should be an even thickness, ready to season and cook as it is or to stuff, roll, tie, and roast.

You can also cut rounds of meat, or medallions, from the whole tenderloin. Medallions $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick cook very quickly. For thinner pieces, pound the medallions between two pieces of waxed paper with a meat pounder or mallet. These superthin pieces cook in just a few minutes; watch them carefully so that they don't overcook.

Chunks of tenderloin make fine kebabs, while thin strips work well for quick sautés in a wok or skillet. Serve them with rice or pasta.

Season before cooking for best flavor. The tender flesh of pork tenderloin has a very mild flavor, which is why you need to season the pork before cooking it. At the very least, I give the tenderloin a generous sprinkling of salt and pepper, but usually I marinate it or rub on a mix of spices.



ROAST IT, GRILL IT, SAUTÉ IT— JUST DON'T OVERCOOK IT

I often cook the tenderloin whole. I season the pork, sear it on all sides in a heavy pan on the stove, and put it in a 350°F oven for about ten minutes. I let it rest a few minutes after cooking and slice it into medallions. At the restaurant I sometimes sear it, broil it for just a few minutes, and let it finish cooking from its own heat outside the oven. This is a surefire way to guarantee that you won't overcook the tenderloin, but it takes a little practice to get the timing right.

I also like to grill tenderloin. You may want to grill chunks on a skewer, or grill a butterflied tenderloin so that it will cook through without overcooking the outside. Another very quick way to cook pork tenderloin is to sauté medallions or cutlets in a hot skillet. I give them just a brief turn in the pan.

Cook the meat until it's pink—not gray. Pork dries out easily during cooking because the fat encircles the flesh rather than marbling it as it does in beef, but overcooking is the real culprit behind a tough tenderloin. Most people have been conditioned to expect tough pork, so they're surprised at

how tender and juicy mine is. It's really no secret how I make it that way—I just don't overcook it.

Pork used to have to be cooked until very well done in order to avoid any risk of trichinosis. Unfortunately that has given pork its undeserved reputation for being dry and stringy. According to The Pork Industry Group, modern methods of pork production have virtually eliminated trichinosis. And in the uncommon instance where trichina is present, scientists say that cooking the pork to 137°F is sufficient to kill it. The USDA still cautions against eating undercooked pork, but that doesn't mean you need to turn it an awful shade of gray to be sure it's safe. Cook the pork just until it's pale pink inside and you'll have a juicy, delicious tenderloin that's safe to eat. Check for doneness by cutting a small slit near the thicker center of the tenderloin: the flesh should be pale pink, and the juices should run clear.

If you feel more comfortable knowing the actual temperature, use an instant-read thermometer (a traditional meat thermometer is too big for the slender tenderloin) and insert it at the thickest part. The USDA and the pork industry still recommend cooking pork to 160°F, but the FDA has lowered that guideline to 150°, which will give you juicier meat. If you go by temperature, take the tenderloin off the heat when it's five degrees below the desired temperature; it will continue to cook in its own heat.

Once you get the idea of how easy pork is to cook, you'll want to experiment with your own spices rubs, marinades, and accompaniments.

You don't need to cook pork tenderloin until it's gray—proper cooking will make it safe, tender, and juicy.



Cooked medallions of pork are kept warm in a sauce of cumin-scented tomatoes. A sprinkling of cilantro leaves brightens this pretty dish.

Punch up the flavor of pork tenderloin with a variety of seasonings. Here the author rubs a mixture of garlic, chile, cumin, and turmeric onto medallions cut from the tenderloin.

Pork Tenderloin with Cumin-Scented Tomatoes

For the best cumin flavor, grind whole cumin seeds to make a powder. *Serves four.*

3 cloves garlic, chopped
One hot fresh chile pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped fine
1 tsp. ground cumin
½ tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. coarse salt
2 Tbs. canola oil; more for cooking
One 16-oz. pork tenderloin, trimmed, silverskin removed, and cut into ¾-inch-thick medallions

FOR THE TOMATOES:

2 Tbs. canola oil
1 small onion, chopped fine
¼ tsp. turmeric
1 tsp. crushed cumin seeds
1 tsp. coarse salt
2 Tbs. white wine (optional)
2 large tomatoes (or about 5 plum tomatoes), chopped coarse (about 3 cups)
½ cup coarsely chopped cilantro leaves for garnish (optional)

In a small bowl, combine the garlic, chile pepper, cumin, turmeric, salt, and oil. Rub this mixture onto the pork

medallions. Let the medallions sit at room temperature while you prepare the tomatoes.

Heat 2 Tbs. canola oil in a skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, turmeric, cumin, and salt; stir for about 1 min. until mixed. Add the wine and let the mixture cook gently over medium-low heat until it turns a light brown, about 7 min. Add the tomatoes and cook gently, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are tender but not mushy, about 15 min. Remove from the heat and set aside.

Heat about 1 Tbs. canola oil in a frying pan over medium-high heat. Sear the medallions until lightly browned, about 2 min. per side. Lower the heat to medium; continue cooking until the insides of the medallions are pink and the flesh feels firm, about 5 min.

Spoon a few tablespoons of the tomatoes onto a plate or shallow bowl. Arrange three or four slices of pork on top, sprinkle with cilantro leaves, and serve immediately.

Pork Tenderloin with Honey, Mustard & Rosemary *very good*

Butterflying the tenderloin gives you a larger surface for the marinade to penetrate and allows you to grill or broil the meat quickly, keeping it moist and tender. You can also sauté medallions in a skillet or roast the whole tenderloin as described in the other recipes. *Serves four.*

2 Tbs. honey
2 Tbs. mustard
Two 4-inch sprigs fresh rosemary, stems removed, and needles crushed slightly to release flavor
1 tsp. salt
1 Tbs. crushed black pepper
1 Tbs. black mustard seeds (optional)
2 Tbs. olive oil
One 16-oz. pork tenderloin, trimmed, silverskin removed, and butterflied

Combine the honey, mustard, rosemary, salt, pepper, black mustard seeds, and olive oil in a shallow dish large

enough to hold the pork tenderloin. Add the tenderloin, turn to coat, and marinate it for at least 1 hour.

Heat the grill or broiler. Cook the pork until golden brown on all sides and firm to the touch, about 12 to 15 min. total cooking time. Let the tenderloin rest on a cutting board for a few minutes, cut it on the diagonal into thin slices, and serve.

Pork Tenderloin with Apple Chutney

Apples, a traditional accompaniment to pork, get spiced up with toasted black pepper and allspice. *Serves four.*

1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
2 tsp. salt
2 Tbs. canola oil; more for cooking
One 16-oz. pork tenderloin, trimmed and silverskin removed
FOR THE APPLE CHUTNEY:
1 Tbs. olive oil
2 apples, peeled, cored, and chopped into 1/2-inch dice
1 tsp. toasted, ground black pepper
1/2 tsp. ground allspice
1 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon; more for garnish

Mix the ginger, salt, and 2 Tbs. canola oil together in a small bowl. Gently rub the pork with the ginger mixture and set it aside.

Heat 1 Tbs. olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the apples, pepper, and allspice. Cook until the apples are tender, about 5 min. Add the tarragon and cook another 1 min.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Heat 1 Tbs. canola oil in an oven-proof, heavy-based skillet over medium-high heat. Sear the tenderloin on all sides, browning it, about 2 min. Add a little more oil to the pan, if needed. Put the pork in the oven and roast, turning it occasionally, until cooked through, 10 to 15 min. It should be pink inside, and its juices should run clear. Let the tenderloin rest for a few minutes on a cutting board. Slice it thin and serve it with a few tablespoons of the apple chutney.

Raji Jallepalli cooks pork tenderloin tenderly at Raji, her restaurant in Memphis, Tennessee. ♦



A small tenderloin makes a perfect dinner for two.

An allspice-flavored apple chutney is quick to make and a perfect complement to the ginger rub on the meat. A garnish of quickly fried leeks adds texture and flavor.



Wine Choices

Pork's changeable character works with whites and reds

Pork can be quite a chameleon. Oven-roasted or mesquite-grilled, dressed up with a berry glaze and dried-cherry stuffing, slathered with barbecue sauce, or laced with strong herbs such as rosemary and bay leaf, pork takes on enough character to warrant a red wine: anything from a Beaujolais to a medium-weight Zinfandel. Both of these work well with the honey, mustard, and rosemary recipe above,

standing up to its darkly caramelized grilled surface and its mustard-rosemary seasoning.

But treat pork delicately, as in the other two recipes, and you'll probably prefer a white wine alongside it. That's the tradition, in fact, with the pork-based cuisines of Germany and Alsace, where Gewürztraminer and Rieslings rule.

Both these wines are ideal here. Lively, fruity, floral, and easy to like, they can vary quite a bit in

sweetness. The ones from Alsace, notably Trimbach and Hugel, tend to be completely dry; German bottlings from the Rhine and Mosel valleys have noticeable sugar, which helps temper the chile-pepper spice in the recipe for pork with cumin-scented tomatoes. Gewürztraminer, moreover, has a delightfully spicy edge that adds to its complexity. The spice also helps to tie the wine to the cumin, allspice, ginger, and black pepper

that season these two dishes.

You can find excellent examples of Rieslings and Gewürztraminers made on this side of the Atlantic: California's Navarro, Chateau St. Jean, and Fetzer (in order of increasing sweetness and decreasing price) are all worth seeking out.

—Rosina Tinari Willson is a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco area. She is a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking*.