

Preparation Of Whole Roastling Pigs

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Roasting a whole pig to serve a large group can be done by several methods. However, the procedure should be well planned in order to ensure satisfactory results. Consider that:

The variance in thickness of muscle groups will result in a variation in speed of cooking. The side area will cook more rapidly than the ham or shoulder.

The pig should be cooked to the proper degree of doneness in the thickest part of the carcass—usually the inside of the shoulder. Use a meat thermometer and be certain that the internal temperature reaches 160°F for fresh pork, 155°F for cured pork.

To ensure adequate portions, allow at least 2 pounds of carcass weight (head on) per person.

The pig should be scalded and dehaired (not skinned) for best results.

Spit Roasting

The entire carcass can be secured on a rotating spit device. Carefully anchor all parts of the carcass to the spit. Since the back and loin area cook more rapidly, it must be secured in such a way that it will not flop about and break up as it approaches doneness. The rate of cooking can be adjusted somewhat by varying the fire—a hotter fire in the ham and shoulder area and a smaller fire in the loin area.

The fire, usually charcoal briquettes, should not be located directly below the spit. Fat dripping into the fire can cause a flame that could char the outside of the pig. An adequate water sprayer is needed for fire flare-ups from the fat. Heat can be retained by constructing a reflecting hood over the spit using corrugated steel roofing material.

Pit Roasting Underground

The entire carcass can be roasted in a closed pit. Dig a hole 3 feet deep, 30 inches wide and of sufficient length to accommodate the pig. Build a wood fire in the pit and allow 12 inches of hot coals to build up. This will require about 3-4 hours burning time and wood equal to about 2 times the volume of the pit. Use only dry hardwood.

When sufficient coals have accumulated, level them and remove any unburned chunks. Cover the coals completely with a 2-inch layer of pea gravel. Place the carcass on a sheet of 2 x 4 inch welded wire, and lower it into the pit. Cover immediately with galvanized roofing supported on pipe or steel posts. Then put 12 inches of dirt over the entire pit. Allow the pig to cook for about 10 hours (or until the internal temperature of the ham reaches 160°F).

Pit Roasting Above Ground

Whole hogs, carcass halves or wholesale cuts can also be easily roasted, oven style, in an above ground, concrete block pit. The pit should be constructed on level ground with two parallel rows of blocks placed wide enough apart to accommodate the width of the carcass (Figure 1). Best results are achieved by making the pit three blocks high with an expanded metal screen placed between the second and third layers (Figure 2).

Twenty pounds of charcoal briquettes can be placed on either or both ends of the pit. They should not be placed directly under the carcass to avoid flare-ups from the dripping grease.

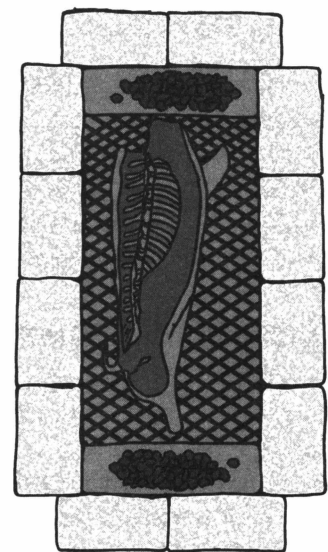


Figure 1.

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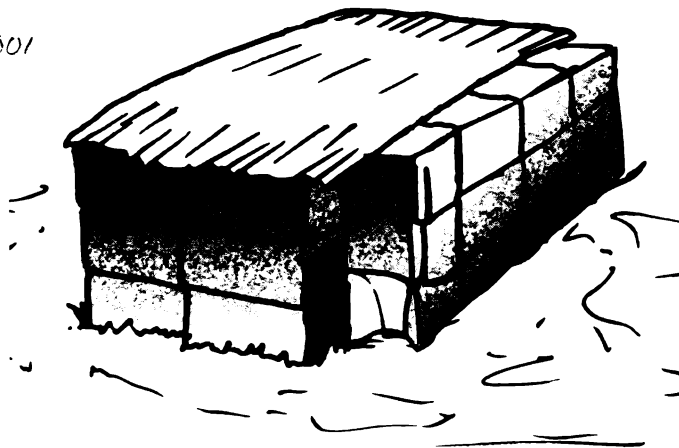


Figure 2. Side View of Pit

After the coals are hot, the carcass should be placed on the screen fat side down. Barbeque sauce can be applied on the lean surface and on ribs. Meat thermometers should be placed in the ham and shoulder.

At this time, the ends of the pit should be closed with blocks that can be easily removed for the addition of more charcoal. Corrugated steel roofing material should then be placed on top of the pit to completely seal it for an oven effect. The intensity of the heat can be controlled by the amount of charcoal used in the pit.

Once the blocks absorb heat, the pit will completely cook any large carcass. An 80-pound carcass half will need about 7-8 hours of roasting depending on whether one or two charcoal fires are utilized. The finished internal temperature of the meat should be 160°F. During roasting, the shoulder portion of a carcass will generally cook slightly slower than the ham. Therefore, the hotter charcoal fire should be built on the shoulder end of the carcass to ensure even cooking. If only one fire is used, it should be built at the shoulder end.

Advantages of using this pit system are many. Besides being easy to construct, it is inexpensive and portable. Once placed on the grill, the carcass does not have to be turned or flipped. Less charcoal is necessary than for traditional open pits and, if the coals are placed correctly, there should be no grease fires or charred meat.

Smoked Roast Pig

If a controlled smokehouse is available, the whole pig can be prepared in it. Pump the entire carcass with a ham curing brine, and place in a cooler for 7 days or more in the same manner a ham would be cured. Place the carcass on a rack in the smokehouse and apply heat and a light smoke for 24 hours or more. Adjust the heat to reach an internal temperature of 155°F.

Small Suckling Pigs

The following recipe can be used to prepare a small suckling pig carcass in an oven:

Roast Suckling Pig Parisienne

Wash a young suckling pig carcass weighing about 10 pounds in several changes of cold water and dry it well. Rub inside with a cut clove of garlic and brush with brandy. Make a stuffing as follows: Soak 3 cups of soft bread crumbs in cider and squeeze them dry, shaking the crumbs well to lighten them. To the crumbs add 2 tablespoons each of chopped parsley and finely chopped chives; 1/2 clove garlic mashed to a pulp; 3 tablespoons grated onion; and 4 small pork sausage patties, cooked, skinned, and crumbled. Season the mixture to taste with salt, pepper, a few thyme leaves and a dash of nutmeg, mace, and cloves. Combine the ingredients thoroughly and beat in 2 eggs.

Stuff the carcass loosely and skewer and lace the opening. Truss the forelegs and the hind legs forward separately and close under the body. Wipe the pig with a damp cloth, then brush generously with melted butter. With a sharp pointed knife, make a number of little slashes over the top of the pig to enable the fat to drip down into the roasting pan. Place a block of wood in the pig's mouth to brace it for the apple that will be inserted later. Cover the ears with brown paper to keep them from burning. Roast the suckling pig in a moderate oven for 3 to 3-1/2 hours, according to its size, or until the meat is tender and thoroughly cooked. Cover the roast with brown paper if it is browning too fast and baste it frequently with the fat from the pan, to which has been added 1 cup of hot water.

While the pig is roasting, make stock for the gravy. Boil the pig's heart in just enough salted water to cover. When it is almost tender, add the pig's liver, 2 tablespoons grated onion, and 1 tablespoon each of chopped parsley and green pepper. Simmer until the heart and liver are tender. Chop them and mix with the pan drippings and some of the stock. Skim off the fat and thicken the gravy with 2 tablespoons flour kneaded with 2 tablespoons of butter. Cook for a few minutes, and keep hot in a sauceboat.

Dress the pig on a large heated platter and remove the block of wood from its mouth, replacing it with a red apple. Garnish the platter with crisp watercress and rub the skin gently but thoroughly with a piece of butter folded in a thickness of cheesecloth until all the butter is used and the skin is shiny and crisp. Garnish with baked apples topped with a ring of cranberries. Put a cranberry necklace and earrings on the pig. Serve with cranberry sauce.