

A tender touch

Tips for a tasty pork tenderloin

NATIONAL PORK BOARD

BY LAURA LANGSTON

PORK TENDERLOIN IS sometimes overlooked when people think about dinner, because cooks aren't always sure what to do with the long, lean cut. It's a shame, because pork tenderloin is a fabulous choice for both quick weeknight meals and fancy weekend feasts.

Sometimes called pork tender, pork tenderloin is a thin, boneless strip of meat typically weighing between 1 and 1½ pounds that comes from the same region of the pig as the back ribs. It's called tenderloin because it's incredibly tender and succulent.

It's also good for you. "With less than 4 grams of saturated fat per pound, pork tenderloin is a great choice of lean protein," says Lori Zanini, a registered dietitian nutritionist and spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "And it's heart healthy as well."

It's also incredibly versatile and easily adapts to multiple cooking methods. Before cooking, trim the tenderloin to your liking. Then the whole tenderloin can be roasted, broiled, sautéed, grilled or even cooked in a slow cooker, Zanini's preferred choice. She tops her tenderloin with sliced apples, chopped onions and a teaspoon or two of cinnamon and adds ¼ cup of water before cooking it on low for six to eight hours.

Another option? Slice the raw tenderloin crosswise into ¼- to ½-inch medallions (as if you're cutting a loaf of French bread) and sauté them in a frying pan with garlic, onion, mushrooms and fresh tarragon for 5 minutes before deglazing the pan with wine or chicken stock. Or cube the raw meat and sauté it in a stir-fry. For something more elegant, slice the tenderloin lengthwise (not all the way through), spread it open and lightly pound it before stuffing it with a

mixture of chopped fruit, nuts and herbs. Roll it back up jelly roll style, tie with string and roast (see cooking times and instructions below).

Because it has a mild taste, pork tenderloin is a perfect canvas for many flavors. Consider marinating it for a few hours or overnight before grilling or roasting. To a basic marinade of equal parts olive oil and lemon juice, add your choice of herbs (tarragon and thyme for French-inspired, rosemary and oregano for Greek, etc.). For an Asian marinade, blend equal parts soy sauce and rice vinegar with chopped ginger and green onion. Stop there or flavor that basic blend with the addition of any (or all) of the following: brown sugar, chili sauce, sesame oil, minced garlic, five-spice powder and chopped lemongrass.

For a faster infusion of flavor, consider a rub. The options are endless. To a blend of salt and pepper, add your herbs or spices of choice. Using a fork, lightly pierce the tenderloin before rubbing with 1 tablespoon of cooking oil. Then use your hands and lightly rub the spices into the tenderloin until it's evenly coated. It's now ready to cook.

Pork tenderloin cooks quickly. It takes 15 to 20 minutes on a medium-high grill (400 F), or 30 to 35 minutes in a 350 F oven. Stuffed tenderloin takes a little longer, 45 to 60 minutes at 375 to 400 F. Tenderloin should be cooked to an internal temperature between 145 and 160 F per the U.S. Department of Agriculture, followed by a three-minute rest. If the meat is a little pink that means the whole tenderloin is cooked but still juicy.

Refrigerate any leftovers within an hour of serving and plan to eat them within four or five days. For longer storage, leftovers can be frozen for up to three months. **C**

ROASTED PORK TENDERLOIN WITH ASIAN DRY RUB

1 tablespoon light brown sugar, packed
1 teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon ground cloves
½ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper

2 pork tenderloins (1 pound each), trimmed

Preheat oven to 425 F. Line a medium baking pan with foil.

Stir together brown sugar, ginger, cinnamon, salt, pepper, cloves and cayenne pepper in small bowl. Rub pork with mixture.

Place pork in prepared pan and roast for 15 to 18 minutes, or until the pork's internal temperature reaches 145 F. Remove from oven, cover loosely with foil and let stand for 3 minutes. Cut into slices. Serve with brown rice tossed with thinly sliced scallions and fresh chopped cilantro, steamed bok choy or broccoli drizzled with sesame oil. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Courtesy of the National Pork Board (pork.org)

* 350°F for 35 min to 1 hr. Check temp. at 35 min. and every few minutes after that. *

THE COSTCO CONNECTION

Look for pork tenderloin and a variety of pork cuts in the meat department of your Costco warehouse.

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