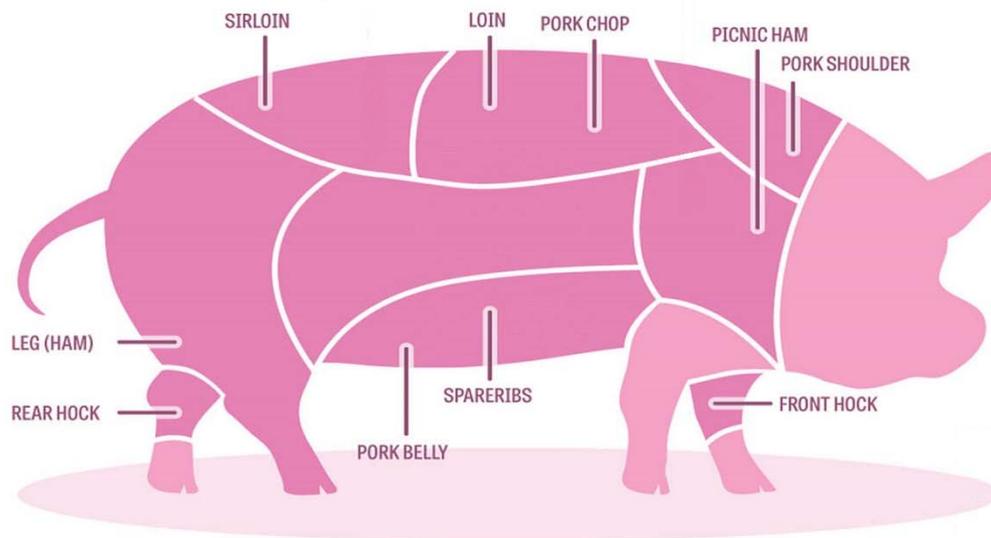


Whisper Ranch



Pastured Pork Cuts, Cooking Tips & Nutrition

We have had some questions about where all the cuts come from, the best cut choices and cooking methods for each cut of pork. We decided to put together this info sheet to give you a better idea of where on the pig the cuts come from and some ideas to help you choose the best cuts for your needs. And, of course, how to cook them to get the best flavor out of each piece of meat.

In general, the main cuts from the top of the pig (like the loin) are leaner and more tender than those from the bottom. However, cooking the tougher cuts (like the shoulder and the hocks) low and slow can make them tender and juicy.

PORK SHOULDER, or PORK BUTT

- Starting from the front of the pig: Pork shoulder (also called pork butt or “Boston butt”) is generally cut as a boneless roast. Another option is shoulder steaks.
- Cook: It’s a really great thing to roast. It’s a relatively tough cut, well layered with fat, and is good for braising, slow and low roasting or barbecue. Shoulders are good for when you’re going to cook it for a long period of time and want it to stay moist. A typical preparation? Pulled pork. Cooking Pork Shoulder Roast is very different than Tenderloin or Pork Loin Roast. Shoulder is a more well-used muscle in the pig, so it needs time for the connective tissue to break down. At least 6 hours on low in the crockpot or 2-3 hours in the oven at 300° F but it will be awesomely tender!
- Side note: Why is this cut sometimes called “pork butt” when it doesn’t come from the actual rear end? The word butt has its roots in old English, which is a quasi-Germanic language, and butt means ‘the widest part. On a pig, the widest part is the shoulder, not its actual rear end. And that’s why it’s called the butt.

PICNIC HAM

- Immediately below the shoulder is the next cut you’re likely to find: the Picnic Ham (occasionally called the picnic shoulder). When you hear “ham” you think of the rear leg. But the picnic ham is the lower part of shoulder. This can be ordered cured or as fresh roasts and can also be made into ground.

- Cook: Braise or smoke – two good long, slow cooking methods to render the fat and make the meat tender and juicy. The sizeable fat cap on the picnic ham is great for making cracklings.

HOCK

- This cut usually comes already brined and smoked and sold as a “ham hock” in the store. Can be ordered fresh or cured.
- Cook: Use the brined and smoked version for beans or collard greens. Use it to stew or braise – any kind of long, low, wet cooking.

PORK LOIN or TENDERLOIN

- The pork loin comes from the pig’s back and is large, lean and tender. If a tenderloin is not desired they will be made into more chops.
- Cook: The whole loin is more of a slow roast. But don’t cook it too much, or on too high of a heat – because it is so lean, it will get pretty dry. Tenderloin should be marinated and quickly cooked. It is a very lean, but very tender cut. Don’t overcook it, or it will dry out!

LOIN PORK CHOPS

- Thick or thin, pork chops are cut from meat perpendicular to the spine.
- Cook: These are a high heat, fry or grill kind of thing. Grill them hot and fast. We keep them pink inside. Let rest under foil for 8-10 minutes. Alternately, you can sear and braise these cuts in the oven, but they will not get tender until they are baked for about an hour. If they are still tough after baking, keep cooking!

PORK BELLY

- If you go up to rub a pig’s belly you’re, well, rubbing the belly meat. Bacon is pork belly cured, smoked, and sliced. You can also order it fresh, meaning uncured.
- Cook: The belly itself is a great mid temp braising cut. Belly is super – you can do all kinds of stuff with belly.

SIRLOIN

- Continuing to move back, next up is sirloin, which is cut up into chops or fresh roast
- Cook: To cook chops marinate and grill.

REAR LEG or HAM

- Most people order the rear leg as ham – cured, smoked and processed in some kind of way. However you can order them as a fresh roast or cutlets or jerky as well. Our butcher makes an exceptional pork jerky!
- Cook: For a fresh roast score the skin, rub with garlic herb paste and roast at 300 degrees for 2 or 3 hours. It’s a great roast pork, a little leaner. To cook ham, bake at 300 until it has reached and internal temperature of 130.

ADDITIONAL COOKING TIPS

- Grass-fed pastured products are very different than factory products. Cooking it is easy but you will need to retrain yourself if you haven’t cooked them before. It has considerably more developed muscle structure. This is because our pigs aren’t couch potatoes. They are most often

out wandering around the pasture rooting and exploring. Commercial pigs spend their life laying on a concrete slat floor so they really don't develop any muscles. Our pork is somewhat more delicate than commercial meat.

- Please do not overcook it to a leathery consistency like most of our grandparents and parents did. Pastured meat cooks 20-30% faster than factory meat. You will be disappointed if you overcook it. If you do by accident, braising the meat can salvage it to some degree.
- Thaw pork before cooking to room temperature before cooking. Do not microwave to thaw.
- Do not wash the pork before cooking.
- When cutting meat – cooked or raw – cut against the grain. This will prevent the muscle from shrinking and getting tough (this means cut across the long muscles not parallel to them).
- Do not over trim meat – leave plenty of fat on. This provides flavor, moisture and insulation for the meat.
- We highly suggest using a meat thermometer (don't worry you won't be uncool).
- Cast iron or French steel pans are best.
- An internal temperature of 145° F for pork cuts like steaks, roasts and chops and 160° F for ground and ground cuts like fresh sausage.
- Let it rest: Remove the meat from the cooking medium when it is 10° F below the ideal finished temperature as it will continue cooking when removed from the heat. Let it sit for 8 – 10 minutes before serving. This will let the juices redistribute throughout the meat and you'll get a much better end result.
- Marinating is a great way to tenderize pastured pork.

NUTRITIONAL NOTES

Antibiotics and hormones aside – as I think we have all heard about these and some of the related problems – we don't use them, end of story. A major problem with the diet of factory farmed pigs is arsenic. Arsenic is a powerful carcinogen to humans, but routinely fed to chickens and pigs to make them grow faster and improve the color of the meat. This ends up in your meat which end up in you. Enough said I think. They also eat a disgusting variety of waste products and whatever else the agricultural industry needs to get rid of. These things include meat judged unfit for human consumption, liquefied puppy chow, manure (did you catch that? They eat their own poop), and even *plastic* (supposedly to replace natural sources of fiber like grass and leaves). They're also stuffed full of just about anything that might make them grow or gain weight more quickly, no matter how toxic it might be down the line. In pork, a big issue is fat quality. This comes directly from their diet. In nature, pigs eat pretty much anything they can get their snouts into: roots, grass, leaves, grubs, nuts, berries and fruit, and bugs. Omega-3's are found in high concentration in grass and leaves. This leads to very high Omega-3 fat content in pastured pork which is good for you! Contrasted to factory-farmed pig's diets which are largely based on corn and soybean meal, together with all sorts of disgusting chemicals and garbage. This feed is very high in Omega-6, and the more Omega-6 fats in the pig's diet, the more will be in the meat. Too much Omega-6 is not good for you!