

Fennel & Herb-Brined Pork Rib Roast With Cherry-Fennel Relish

Serves 8

Ask the butcher to french the rib roast (trim the excess fat and meat off the bones) for a nicer presentation. You'll need to brine this at least one day ahead. You can also make the relish a day ahead; reheat just before serving.

The brine

- 1 gallon cold water
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup kosher salt
- 2 bay leaves, crumbled
- 2 tablespoons fennel seeds
- 2 teaspoons whole cloves
- 2 teaspoons black peppercorns
- 6 cloves garlic, smashed

The roast

- 1 8-bone pork rib roast, about 6 pounds, frenched
- 2 tablespoons fennel seeds
- 2 tablespoons fresh thyme leaves
- 4 teaspoons black peppercorns
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil + 2 tablespoons for searing

The relish

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup minced shallots
- ¾ cup diced fennel
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1½ tablespoons cider vinegar
- ¼ cup cherry preserves
- 1¼ cups dried tart cherries
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Instructions: A day or two before serving, prepare the brine. In a container large enough to hold the brine plus the rib roast, combine the water, brown sugar and salt. Stir well until the sugar and salt are dissolved. Add in the bay leaves, fennel seeds, cloves, peppercorns and garlic, and stir to incorporate. Submerge the pork roast in the brine, weighting it down with a plate or pot lid if necessary. Refrigerate for 24-48 hours.

An hour before you're ready to cook the pork, remove it from the brine, rinse well to remove some of the salt, and pat completely dry.

In a mortar and pestle or spice grinder, mash the fennel seeds, thyme, peppercorns and salt; add the ¼ cup olive oil to make a paste. Rub the mixture evenly on all sides of the pork roast, and let stand for up to an hour.

Preheat the oven to 375°.

In an oven-safe saute pan large enough to hold the roast, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over high heat until shimmering but not smoking. Sear the pork on all sides (about 2 minutes per side), until it has a nice bronzed crust. Place it bone side down in the pan, and place the entire pan in the oven. Roast until a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the pork reads 145°, about 1½ to 2 hours. Depending on the thickness, it may cook faster, so start

checking the temperature after 1 hour. Remove from oven and let rest for about 20 minutes before carving.

While the roast cooks, make the cherry-fennel relish. Heat the olive oil in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the shallots, fennel and garlic, and saute until they have softened slightly, about 6-8 minutes. Pour in the cider vinegar and cook until almost all of it has evaporated.

Add the cherry preserves and the dried cherries, and cover with about ½ to ¾ cup water. Bring to a simmer, and cook until the cherries soften, about 7-8 minutes.

Remove from heat and puree in a blender or food processor. It's OK if the sauce is a little chunky; it should have the texture of applesauce.

Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve with the meat. You can make this sauce at least one day ahead. If you do, reheat before serving.

The nutrients absorbed from brines vary and are difficult to estimate. Variables include the type of food, marinating time and amount of surface area. Therefore, this recipe contains no analysis.

 **Wine pairing:** The upfront spices lend themselves to a bright Syrah. Look for one from the Sonoma Coast or a Crozes-Hermitage.