



Craig Lee / Special to The Chronicle; styling by Katie Popoff

Star Anise Pork Loin With Apricots & Shallots

Serves 4 generously

This is a quick, weeknight dish that tastes a lot more complicated than it really is. Much of the flavor comes from the crust, which is a combo of ground star anise, ground coriander seed, salt and pepper. The dried apricots and shallots amp up the sweet-savory goodness. Try it with roasted potatoes and a simple salad.

1 tablespoon freshly ground star anise (see Note)

1 tablespoon freshly ground coriander seeds

Kosher salt to taste

Fresh black pepper to taste

4 (1-inch thick) boneless loin pork chops, about 2 pounds total

Drizzle of olive oil

½ cup very thinly sliced dried apricots (about 10)

1 cup thinly sliced shallots

Drizzle of apple vinegar (or almost any other kind)

Instructions: Place the loins on a cutting board, and liberally sprinkle with the star anise, coriander, salt and pepper; press in as much of the spice mixture as you can with your fingers. Coat one side only.

Preheat the oven to 375°. Lightly coat an extra-large cast iron or heavy oven-proof skillet with olive oil; place skillet over high heat. When the oil begins to shimmer, add the pork, spice-side down. Sprinkle a modest amount of salt and pepper onto the unspiced side. Continue to cook for about 3 minutes without moving or shaking the pan. The spice coating should be nicely

browned at this point, but if not, keep cooking until it is. Use tongs to gently turn pork chops over.

Move the chops around the edge of the pan, then place apricots and shallots in the center. Drizzle in a little olive oil if it seems dry; stir. Cook for about a minute, then place the pan in the oven.

Roast for about 10 minutes, or a little less if you prefer a slight pinkness. Move meat to a cutting board to rest. Stir the apricot-shallot mixture to incorporate all juices and any browned bits. Add a small drizzle of vinegar to taste. Place the pork on warmed

plates and top with the apricot-shallot mixture.

Note: The best place to buy whole spices is at Indian markets, where the turnover is high and the prices low. Another excellent source is the San Francisco Herb Co. (250 14th St.), which sells all kinds of wonderful goodies at great prices. To grind the whole star anise and coriander seeds, use an electric coffee grinder.

Per serving: 366 calories, 46 g protein, 18 g carbohydrate, 12 g fat (4 g saturated), 114 mg cholesterol, 100 mg sodium, 3 g fiber.

Wine pairing: A more mannerly Zin will complement these spices. Try the 2008 Shenandoah Vineyards California Zinfandel (\$11).

XNIP code: QGG6