

Maple-Glazed Pork Roast

An unexpected (and easy) technique yields tender, juicy pork with a rich, clingy glaze that packs pure maple flavor—all in less than an hour.

BY ADAM RIED

From pancakes to pineapple, New Englanders will slather maple syrup on just about anything. Among the multitude of dishes done right by a dash of maple, classic New England maple-glazed pork roast is one of our favorites. Sweet maple, with its delicate flavor notes of smoke, caramel, and vanilla, makes an ideal foil for pork, which has a faint sweetness of its own. The result of this marriage is a glistening maple-glazed pork roast, which, when sliced, combines the juices from tender, well-seasoned pork with a rich maple glaze to create complex flavor in every bite.

When I tested five different recipes, however, I found that this dish often falls short of its savory-sweet promise. Of course, many of the roasts turned out dry (a constant concern when cooking today's lean pork), but I was surprised to discover that the glazes presented even bigger problems. Most of them were too thin to coat the pork properly, some were so sweet that they required a hotline to the dentist's office, and none of them had a pronounced maple flavor.

Pick of the Pork

Good maple-glazed roast pork starts out as good plain roast pork. I wanted a boneless cut, of which there are four popular choices: the blade roast, which is cut from the animal's shoulder; the blade-end loin roast, cut from the loin near the shoulder blade; the center loin roast, cut from the center of the loin; and the sirloin roast, cut from the posterior of the loin. Tasters preferred the blade-end loin roast for its flavor and juiciness, which it receives in part from a deposit of fat that separates the two muscle sections at one end of the roast.

As is the custom in our test kitchen, I tried brining the meat (soaking it in a saltwater solution to season and boost juiciness), and brining did, indeed, yield tender, juicy, well-seasoned pork. On the other hand, the unbrined pork was almost as good (as long as I took care not to overcook it), and it was nice to dispense with the 2½-hour



Don't bother using "maple-flavored" syrup, such as Aunt Jemimah or Log Cabin, to glaze this roast—it will taste like the corn syrup it is. Only real maple will do, and if you can get it, darker grade B tastes even stronger than the ubiquitous grade A.

brining time. Tasters also noted that the minor improvements realized by brining were lost to the assertively sweet glaze, so brining was out. I also ran a series of tests using "enhanced" pork, a common supermarket product that has been injected with a solution of water, salt, and sodium phosphate to season the meat and add moisture. Tasters were put off by the flood of liquid these roasts released when they were sliced, as well as by the overly wet, spongy texture of the meat.

In cooking more than a dozen roasts up to this point, I had learned that the real key to juicy pork is simple. Don't overcook it. In the old days, when pork had more fat and the trichinosis parasite was a more persistent threat, pork was routinely cooked to an internal temperature of 160 degrees. Today, pork is considerably leaner, and the possibility of contamination with trichinosis has been reduced to almost nil. This means that pork can be safely served at 145 to 150 degrees (measured in

the center of the roast). If, however, you take the roast out of the oven once it reaches this temperature, it will be overcooked. The reason is simple: The temperature of the roast continues to rise, by as much as 15 degrees. The thing to do is to remove the roast when it hits a mere 135 degrees and then let it rest on the cutting board before slicing.

Innumerable tests here at *Cook's* have proven that roasts with a deep brown, caramelized crust both look and taste better than those without. Trying to brown the meat using high oven heat at the beginning or end of the roasting produced marginal results, so I decided to sear it on the stovetop. Because the meat was tied into a neat bundle, it fit well in a skillet on the stovetop, which gave me great browning and lots of control over the process. From the hot skillet, the loin went onto a rack in a roasting pan placed in a 325-degree oven, which proved to be the temperature of choice for even cooking.

Glazing Saddles

Now it was time to get serious about developing maple flavor. The recipes I had researched touted dozens of glaze concoctions and methods for marrying them to the pork. Most of the flavoring ingredients added to the maple syrup either diluted it (so that it was too thin to use as a glaze) or were simply unwelcome. This list included soy sauce, vinegar, lemon juice, cranberry juice, cider, and bourbon for liquid ingredients and herbs, spices, jams, jellies, brown sugar, maple sugar, mustards, and chiles for flavor boosters. (I reserved the best of these flavorings for recipe variations). Everyone agreed, however, that small amounts of complementary spices added subtle dimension to the maple, thus cinnamon, ground cloves, and cayenne all found their way into the glaze recipe. Still, I wanted more maple flavor and a glaze that would really stick to the meat. I even tried brining one loin in maple syrup and wrapping another with maple-flavored bacon. The former added no discernible maple flavor, while the latter tasted mildly artificial. I finally hit upon a simple solution to enhance flavor when I reduced the maple

TECHNIQUE | SPINNING THE ROAST



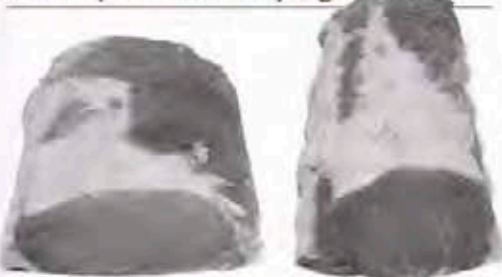
Use tongs to roll and spin the roast in the glaze that pools at the sides of the skillet.

syrup in a saucepan. But I was frustrated when it dripped down off the roast onto the bottom of the roasting pan and burned.

Then I had an idea. Remember the hot pan I had left from searing the roast? How about putting it to additional use? First, I decided to use it to flash-reduce the maple syrup. I removed the loin from the pan after searing, poured off excess fat, added the syrup, and let it heat for 30 seconds. This allowed me to use the drippings that had formed in the pan when the meat seared and also eliminated the extra pan I had been using to reduce the syrup. Second, I decided to lose the roasting pan (and basting brush, which I invariably trashed with the sticky glaze) in favor of the same skillet. Instead of pouring the glaze mixture over the pork in the roasting pan, where it would run to the edges and scorch, I returned the seared loin to the skillet with the syrup, twirled the pork around in the glaze a couple of times with tongs, and popped the whole thing into the oven, with the skillet serving as the roasting pan.

The smaller surface area of the skillet prevented the glaze from spreading out and burning. This pan also made it easier to coat the pork thoroughly

The Importance of Tying



UNTIED AND UNEVEN TIED AND TIDY

Straight from the supermarket packaging, most pork loins will lie flat in the pan and cook unevenly (left). Tying the roast not only yields more attractive slices but ensures that the roast will have the same thickness from end to end so that it cooks evenly (right).

because it was sitting right in the glaze, like a belle in her bath. The roast emerged from the oven with a thick, uniform, glistening coating of glaze and an impressive, concentrated maple flavor. I had managed to turn this into a one-pan dish by searing, reducing the glaze, and roasting all in the same skillet. And there was yet another bonus. Starting with a hot skillet shaved a little time off the whole process. This skillet-roasted, burnished beauty was now out of the oven in 45 minutes or less.

MAPLE-GLAZED PORK ROAST

SERVES 4 TO 6

A nonstick ovenproof skillet will be much easier to clean than a traditional one. Whichever you use, remember that the handle will be blistering hot when you take it out of the oven, so be sure to use a pot holder or oven mitt. Note that you should not trim the pork of its thin layer of fat. The flavor of grade B maple syrup (sometimes called "cooking maple") is stronger and richer than grade A, but grade A syrup will work well, too. This dish is unapologetically sweet, so we recommend side dishes that take well to the sweetness. Garlicky sautéed greens, braised cabbage, and soft polenta are good choices.

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup maple syrup, preferably grade B
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch ground cloves
- Pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 boneless blade-end pork loin roast (about 2½ pounds), tied at even intervals along length with 5 pieces butcher's twine (see photo below)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position; heat oven to 325 degrees. Stir maple syrup, cinnamon, cloves, and cayenne together in measuring cup or small bowl; set aside. Pat roast dry with paper towels, then sprinkle evenly with salt and pepper.

2. Heat oil in heavy-bottomed ovenproof 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just beginning to smoke, about 3 minutes. Place roast fat-side down in skillet and cook until well browned, about 3 minutes. Using tongs, rotate roast one-quarter turn and cook until well browned, about 2½ minutes; repeat until roast is well browned on all sides. Transfer roast to large plate. Reduce heat to medium and pour off fat from skillet; add maple syrup mixture and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds (syrup will bubble immediately). Off heat, return roast to skillet; using tongs, roll to coat roast with glaze on all sides (see "Spinning the Roast," above). Place skillet in oven and roast until center of roast registers about 135 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 35 to 45 minutes, using tongs to roll

Measuring Juice Lost During Carving



JUICES LOST FROM
ENHANCED PORK

JUICES LOST FROM
REGULAR ROAST

Many markets sell enhanced pork, which has been injected with a water/salt/sodium phosphate solution meant to season the meat and improve juiciness. During testing, we found that an enhanced roast exuded nearly one and a half times as much juice as a regular roast when carved. We recommend buying regular pork.

and spin roast to coat with glaze twice during roasting time. Transfer roast to carving board; set skillet aside to cool slightly to thicken glaze, about 5 minutes. Pour glaze over roast and let rest 15 minutes longer (center of loin should register about 150 degrees on instant-read thermometer). Snip twine off roast, cut into ¼-inch slices, and serve immediately.

MAPLE-GLAZED PORK ROAST WITH ROSEMARY

Follow recipe for Maple-Glazed Pork Roast, substituting 2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary for cinnamon, cloves, and cayenne.

MAPLE-GLAZED PORK ROAST WITH ORANGE ESSENCE

Follow recipe for Maple-Glazed Pork Roast, adding 1 tablespoon grated orange zest to maple syrup along with spices.

MAPLE-GLAZED PORK ROAST WITH STAR ANISE

Follow recipe for Maple-Glazed Pork Roast, adding 4 star anise pods to maple syrup along with spices.

MAPLE-GLAZED PORK ROAST WITH SMOKED PAPRIKA

Follow recipe for Maple-Glazed Pork Roast, adding 2 teaspoons smoked hot paprika to maple syrup along with spices.