

Cider Braised Pork Shoulder

Serves 4-6 | 20 minutes prep + 2-3 hours cook time

We love pork shoulder. It's easy to find, and it's usually the best value in the meat case, but it's also delicious. The actual shoulder breaks down into two slightly different primal cuts, the picnic shoulder from the lower part of the leg and the Boston butt from the top. While the butt might have a bit more marbling, both cuts have plenty of the intermuscular fat that produce juicy and tender meat. Most of the boneless pork shoulder roasts you'll find in the grocery store are cut from the picnic.

Pork and apple make for a tasty combination, and cooking the pork with the crisp, dry flavor of Mill A hard cider is our favorite way to bring them together. The acid in the cider helps tenderize the pork, and the subtle sweetness plays off the savory flavors of the meat. Serve this with grits or polenta that can soak up the tasty juices, or use the braising liquid to make a gravy that's perfect for rice or pasta.

2-3 lb boneless pork shoulder

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

2 teaspoons kosher style sea salt

2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper

1 onion, quartered and sliced

2 stalks celery

2 medium carrots

1-2 cans Mill A Sunsetter hard cider

Step 1 Pat the pork dry and rub with the salt. If possible, refrigerate overnight or for a few hours.

Step 2 Heat the olive oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Brown the pork on all sides, sprinkling with freshly ground black pepper as you turn it.

Step 3 Cut the onion, carrot, and celery into roughly 2 inch chunks. Arrange around the shoulder. Pour enough cider over the pork until it almost covers the meat, but leave the top exposed. Drain any extra cider. Cut a piece of parchment paper (aluminum foil also works) to cover the pork, and press it down over the meat. Cover and cook in a 300f oven. Check after 30 minutes, and if the liquid is boiling instead of gently simmering, reduce the heat to 275F.

Step 4 Check every 30-45 minutes, adjusting heat to keep liquid at a gentle simmer and adding more cider if needed to keep the liquid level up at about ½ the thickness of the pork. After 2 ½ hours, check to see if the pork is tender enough to pull apart with a fork. If so, remove from the oven and let rest overnight if possible. Remove the vegetables and, if desired, chop finely and return to the pot. Reheat in the oven at 350 for about 30 minutes or on the stovetop over low heat until warmed through.

Step 5 If you prefer a thicker gravy, combine 3 tablespoons of flour with enough cold water to make a paste. Stir that into the braising liquid, bring to a boil, and cook until it thickens.