

Poc Chuc, Yucatan-Style Grilled Pork

Serves 4-6 | 30 minutes prep (plus overnight marinade) + 20 minutes cook time

A few years ago Judith and I celebrated our 30th anniversary with a trip to Mérida, the old colonial city that's the capital of the Mexican state of Yucatan and built over the ruins of the Mayan city of Ichcaanzihóo. The Mayans developed the most sophisticated and highly developed writing system in pre-Columbian Americas, along with incredible art, architecture, and mathematics. While the brutality of Spanish colonization destroyed much of the Mayan culture, the dense jungle left some communities untouched. These remnants serve as tourist attractions as well as symbols of the advanced civilization that once existed.

Some of the food reflects the Mayan influence, too, like the pit roasted pork called cochinta pibil, and the relleno negro, a turkey stew cooked with a black paste made from roasted chiles. While poc chuc gets its name from the Mayan phrase for cooking over charcoal, the sour oranges used for flavor come from the colonizers.

More widely known as Seville oranges, the bitter citrus originated in SE Asia before traveling west to India and Iran, where it was called narenj. Introduced to Spain by the Moors (who also gave Spanish the word for orange, naranja), the fruit traveled to the New World with the conquistadors. It thrived along the Gulf coast, and naranja agria, typically shortened to naran'agria, became a key ingredient in the cooking of the Yucatan.

Since they can be hard to find here, I use Mexican cookbook author Patti Jinich's substitute, a blend of equal parts grapefruit, orange, lime juices with vinegar to match the acidity of the Seville oranges. But I added banana vinegar instead of distilled white vinegar for a little more flavor in the marinade.

I like to use pork shoulder, more flavorful than the tender cuts like loin. Sometimes I buy the country style "ribs," which are really shoulder cut into rib-like shapes, then freeze the pieces for about 20 minutes and slice them in half lengthwise. But it's easier to just ask the butcher to cut some boneless shoulder about ½ inch thick.

**2 lbs boneless pork shoulder,
cut into strips ½ inch thick**

**1/2 cup freshly squeezed lime
juice**

**1/2 cup freshly squeezed
orange juice**

**1/2 cup freshly squeezed
grapefruit juice**

1/2 cup banana vinegar

10 cloves (1 head) garlic

Step 1 Combine juice, vinegar, and garlic in blender (or mash the garlic using a mortar and pestle, then mix with juice). Pour over the pork and marinate for at least 2 hrs or overnight.

Step 2 Grill the pork over direct heat until nicely browned and cooked through, about 4-5 minutes per side.

Step 3 Serve with tortillas, refried black beans, and pickled onions.