The purpose of this short manual is to explain to you how to prepare meats from the “dehesa” (pasture land) so that you can enjoy a perfect barbecue. It is a well-known fact that cooking over embers calls for meats with a significant intrinsic degree of hydration, or to put it another way, slightly “fatty” meats. Acorn-fed Iberian pork meats, and in particular “secreto” (a shoulder cut), “pluma” (pork loin extension) and “mogote” (end of loin), have the perfect intramuscular and intermuscular fat for this deep-rooted culinary expression of our traditional gastronomy. We shall therefore focus on how to barbecue these four cuts although we may make some observations that are useful for other Iberian pork cuts.

Prior preparations

- The barbecue grill needs to be very clean, with no pieces of previous barbecues stuck to it and totally dry.
- If the meat is frozen*, it must be defrosted entirely. The ideal way to do this is by keeping it in a vacuum bag in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours, to ensure the defrosting process is slow.
- Before barbecuing the meat, take it out of the vacuum bag and leave to stand at room temperature for 30-40 minutes.
- Make sure that you have enough charcoal so as not to have to interrupt the cooking process due to lack of embers. Spread the embers out under all of the surface that will cover the meat on the barbecue.
- Ideally you should have some spatula-type tongs to turn the pieces of meat over with. Never do this with a fork or a knife, as juices will be lost every time you stab the meat.
- It is essential that you have a well-sharpened knife and a board to cut the meat on.

*Iberian pork fattened on acorns and grass from the pasture lands are slaughtered only in the months of January, February and March which is when the acorn season, known as the “montanera”, comes to an end. Over these three months País de Quercus vacuum packs and deep freezes (below 41ºC) all the meat from the season so that you can enjoy it throughout the whole year with no detriment to its quality.
How should I cook it?

Many Iberian acorn-fed pork cuts attain their maximum expression when barbecued, although they can also be pan-fried or cooked on a griddle if no barbecue is available. It is safe to say that the fattier cuts of pork like “secreto” (a shoulder cut), “pluma” (pork shoulder extension), “mogote” (end of loin or pork loin extension) are best suited to barbecuing, whilst the leaner cuts such as loin or tenderloin can be prepared very quickly on the griddle or in the frying pan (they would dehydrate and turn dry if barbecued). The best idea is to cook the whole piece, except in the case of very thick pieces like “mogote” and loin, which are best prepared in thin steaks (maximum one centimetre). “Secreto”, pork shoulder extension and pork loin extension are best barbecued whole.

0. Never put salt on the meat before placing it on the barbecue.

1. The embers should be glowing all over, and practically on fire when the meat is placed on the barbecue.
2. The barbecue grill should be pre-heated so that it is hot enough to seal the meat when it is placed on it. It is a good idea to smear some fat or a little oil on it so that the meat does not stick to the barbecue.
3. The aim is for the meat to turn crispy and brown quickly, creating a crust or rind that will prevent it from losing its juices. The meat does not need to be turned over several times. Once is enough.
4. Once the meat is brown on one side, turn the piece over and sprinkle salt over the part that is already brown. Sprinkle salt on the other side when it is served.

The thicker pieces, like “presa” (pork shoulder extension) or T-bone steaks, should be cooked for a few extra minutes over a lower flame (by moving the barbecue grill further away from the embers) after they are brown, so that the heat can rise up into the inside of the cut of meat. Afterwards, turn it over and cook the other side. The meat juices that rise up will be trapped inside by the crust on top and cook the inside of the meat. If you look carefully, you will see how the meat sometimes bulges on top due to the effect of the pressure of the juices.

Presa Ibérica a la parrilla.
After cooking, leave to stand

During the cooking process, due to the action of the heat, the coagulation of the protein tenses the muscular fibres. As the meat cooks from the outside in, the juices disperse towards the centre of the meat, which is the part that is cooked the least. If it is cut immediately, the juices end up on the cutting board instead of staying inside the piece of meat.

To prevent this from happening, the meat must be left to stand after being cooked. In this way this muscles will relax and redistribute the juices all around the piece of meat. To prevent it from losing too much heat, it is a good idea to cover the meat with aluminium foil or a plate while it is left to stand.

For pieces as thick as pork shoulder extension, if cooked whole, we recommend that you wait around 6 minutes. For pieces like the pork loin extension or “secreto” 3 minutes will suffice.

In short, the aim of leaving the meat to stand is to lessen the difference in temperature between the external part of the meat and the interior. This will make the meat tender and juicy after standing.

Degrees of cooking meat

There are various degrees to which we can cook the meat, depending on the thickness of the piece of meat, how hot the embers are and the cooking time. Ideally we should measure the internal temperature of the meat using a cooking thermometer with a stainless steel probe. If no thermometer is available, we can check the cooking time on each side to attain the desired level of cooking. We recommend that the meat be consumed “rare” or “done to perfection”, meaning when any cut of meat is at its very best.

By internal temperature of the meat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooked quickly on both sides or nearly raw</td>
<td>45-50 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>50-55 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done to perfection</td>
<td>55-60 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>60-65 °C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well done</td>
<td>65-70 °C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By approximate cooking time on each side for cooking “to perfection”:

“Presa” (Iberian acorn-fed pork shoulder extension) (600 gr. piece): 8 - 10 minutes.
“Pluma” (Iberian acorn-fed pork loin extension) (200 gr. piece): 2 - 3 minutes.
“Secreto” (Iberian acorn-fed pork shoulder cut) (300 gr. piece): 3 - 4 minutes.
“Mogote” (Iberian acorn-fed head of pork loin or end of loin) (1 cm thick steak): 3 - 4 minutes.
Pasture-fed T-bone steak (approx. 800 gr.): 5 - 6 minutes.
Proper cutting is essential

After being cooked and left to stand, any piece of Iberian acorn-fed pork must be cut in a perpendicular direction to the muscular fibre in order to obtain maximum tenderness.

Iberian Acorn-fed “Secreto”

Without doubt the greatest discovery of Iberian pork cuts. This piece was already well known to butchers, who used to reserve it for themselves when cutting up meat, in order to eat it barbecued, seasoned only with salt: hence its name, ‘secret’. It is extremely juicy and tender. Each piece weighs approximately 300 grams. Since it is fan-shaped, the cuts should be made at two different angles at least, always perpendicular to the apex of the fan. Because of its percentage of fat, it should be placed on the barbecue when the embers are no longer flaming and not so hot. This prevents the flames from charring the meat when the melted fat falls down into the fire. This piece is also especially suitable for pan-frying or cooking on the griddle.

As you can see on the meat when it is still raw, the muscular fibres are at different angles and must be cut perpendicularly in order to ensure it is tender when cooked.

Cut in strips with a maximum thickness of one centimetre or even less.

After cutting suitably at both corners, it can be presented on a plate with a pinch of salt flakes. No raw oil need be added because the piece of meat is already juicy.
Iberian Acorn-fed Pork Shoulder Extension “Presa”

Until recently largely unknown in our cuisine, the “presa” or pork shoulder extension is a cut of meat full of intramuscular fat that makes it extremely flavoursome and juicy. Ideal for pan-frying and barbecuing. It weighs about 600-700 grams.

Due to its thickness and the amount of different muscles this piece contains, it is definitely the most complex piece to cut. Our aim is to ensure that the cuts are always perpendicular to the muscle fibre.

A - First of all we make a cut at both ends of the piece of meat, to see which direction the muscle fibres go in. In one of them you can identify the fibre longitudinally (photo on the right) and in the other you will see a cut that is perpendicular to the fibre (left-hand photo).

B - Starting at the end where you can see the cut perpendicular to the fibre, continue to make parallel cuts to give thin steaks of less than one centimetre thick until reaching approximately the middle of the piece. It is extremely important that the knife is very well sharpened in order to cut the meat like this.
C. When you reach the centre of the piece, cut halfway through the remaining half.

D. Slice both the pieces into thin steaks of no more than one centimetre thick by cutting parallel to the last cut made.

In each piece, you will be able to see that the muscle fibres are perpendicular to the cut. If it is not cut in this way, the meat will not be as tender as it should be.
Iberian Acorn-fed Pork Loin Extension “Pluma”

This is the front part of the loin and has a triangular shape, and should not be confused with the loin tip. It is also called the “butcher’s steak”. It is juicy and tender and has a delicate flavour and perfect for barbecuing. It weighs around 200 gr.

The pork loin extension is the tenderest, juiciest part of the Iberian pig. It is barbecued whole. Never add salt at this point.

It is very easy to cut. Cut into small steaks with a maximum thickness of one centimetre starting at the end and at an angle of about 60 degrees.

Serve with flaked salt and, if desired, a little Extra Virgin Olive Oil.
Head of Loin or “Mogote” (cut before cooking)

The “mogote” is a piece with triangular morphology that is located below the spine and near the “pluma”. It is an exquisite cut weighing approximately 900 gr. with plenty of intramuscular and intermuscular fat, ideal for barbecuing, cooking on the griddle, pan-frying or roasting.

The end or head of loin has a great deal of intermuscular fat, making it ideal for roasting after being cut into steaks about one centimetre thick.

The cross-section cut reveals the fat that connects the different muscles.

If we were to roast this piece whole, the texture would be more rubbery and therefore not as pleasant. This cut of meat calls for nearly-flaming embers, but you must be extremely careful not to let the flames char the meat. The fat of the Iberian pork will start to fall down on the embers and create more flames.
Do you know the difference between an Iberian pig and an Iberian acorn-fed pig?

An Iberian pig can be fed all its life with cereal and leguminous feeds (these pigs are called simply “Iberian pigs” or “fattened Iberian pigs”), or it can be fed on acorns for the last three months of its life, during the “montanera” season (period between November and March when acorns fall from the holm-oaks and cork-oaks). During this time, an Iberian pig completely changes its fatty-acid profile and turns into a “walking olive”: the percentage of oleic acid it contains rises to levels close to those of olive oil. The Iberian breed and free-range life are the architects of this miracle which the “dehesa”, or wooded pasture land, offers us.

Health. There is good fat, too.

It has recently been proven that fats high in monounsaturated fatty acids have a beneficial effect on blood cholesterol levels, leading to an increase in HDL (“good cholesterol”) and reducing atherogenic LDL cholesterol rates. Well, the fat in Iberian acorn-fed or “montanera” pork contains over 55% oleic (monounsaturated) fat. Of the animal and vegetable fats usually found on our tables, only olive oil has a higher oleic acid content. The total proportion of unsaturated fatty acids in the fat of cured products made from Iberian pigs is higher than 70%, making it the most “heart-healthy” of all known animal fats, and even healthier than some vegetable fats.

Fun Facts
- An Iberian pig gains about 1 kilogram in weight every day by eating acorns and grass from the “dehesa” (pasture land).
- The Iberian pig begins the “montanera” season weighing 90-95 kilos and weighs 155-160 kilos when it is slaughtered three months later.
- Every Iberian pig needs at least 20,000 square metres of “dehesa” pasture land (2 football fields) in order to gain those 60-70 kilos.
- An Iberian acorn-fed pig has an approximate lifespan of 18 months. A white pig reared using intensive livestock techniques (99% of the pork on the market) lives around 9 months.
- Iberian pigs peel each acorn they eat.
- 100 ml. of olive oil has 990 kcal., 100 grs. of Iberian acorn-fed ham has 380 kcal.
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