

hog heaven



The fattest pig in town is also the tastiest. | by Jess Thomson

Every Saturday at the University District farmers market, shoppers gather around the Woolly Pigs stand. Clutching baskets of fresh eggs and leafy green veggies, they lean in as Heath Putnam scoots sputtering sausage around on his portable grill. The aroma makes your belly grumble, but this crowd hasn't come to eat. They're here to learn who buys this \$25-per-pound pork and what on earth they plan to do with it.

Last year Putnam's Spokane-based company, Woolly Pigs, imported a herd of Mangalitsa, the curly-bristled Hungarian hog famous in Europe for its fat. Putnam fell in love when he tasted the succulent swine on an Austrian farm, and promptly sunk his savings into importing it. His sustainable, humane pig-rearing practices make the meat pricey, "but Mangalitsa isn't a different kind of pork," he explains. "It's a different animal."

While most U.S. pork comes from "meat-type" breeds—animals that produce lean muscle mass most efficiently—Mangalitsa

is a "lard type," best at making fat. (Putnam compares it to Wagyu, the cow that yields kobe beef, another example of a blubbery breed). One of Putnam's favorite cuts, a pork belly and spare rib piece he calls the Notorious C.U.T., yields about 80 percent light, flavorful fat and 20 percent luxuriously marbled meat.

Because a Mangalitsa's muscle fibers are longer than those of other pigs, Putnam spends much of his market time coaching buyers on cooking it. "It has to be slow-roasted, braised, or cured," he says. "The last thing we want is for people to buy expensive meat and cook it badly." That's not a problem for the handful of Seattle chefs who've caught Mangalitsa madness—the porky pig can now be found on some of the best menus around town. ✨

Find Woolly Pigs' meat at University District, West Seattle, Bellevue, and Kirkland farmers markets, or at www.woolypigs.com.

VIETNAMESE PORK BELLY

RECIPE COURTESY ERIC BANH OF MONSOON

INGREDIENTS

TO CURE

- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 1 tbsp whole black peppercorns
- 1 large piece pork belly (3½–4 lbs)

TO BRAISE

- Juice of 3 young coconuts (or 20 oz canned coconut juice)
- 2 cups chicken stock
- 5 cloves garlic
- 2 tbsp kosher salt
- ¼ cup fish sauce
- 2 tbsp caramelized sugar (available in Asian markets) or dark brown sugar
- 10 hard-cooked eggs, peeled (optional)

DIRECTIONS

Place pork belly in a pan. Coat with salt and peppercorns. Cover pan tightly with plastic wrap. Let cure in refrigerator for at least 1 day, and up to 3 days.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Remove cured belly from refrigerator. In a large pan, sear pork on both sides over medium-high heat until browned, about 5 minutes per side. (For easier browning, cut meat into 3 or 4 pieces.) Set aside.

Meanwhile, in a deep baking pan or braising pot, combine coconut juice, chicken stock, garlic, salt, fish sauce, and sugar. Stir to combine. Add pork belly. Completely cover the belly and braising liquid with a sheet of parchment to regulate temperature, then place a tight-fitting lid on top. Braise in oven for about 3 hours. Add eggs after 1 hour. When the belly is tender, it can be served immediately. Cut into 3-by-1-inch pieces. Spoon each serving into a shallow bowl and drizzle in some of the liquid. Place 1 egg on top. Serve with cornichons or pickled leeks on the side.

MAKES
6-8
SERVINGS

PREP TIME
30
MINUTES

TOTAL TIME
1-3
DAYS

dish

