

Carne en Salsa de Almendras

Many years ago, I always used to cook recipes for the first time in vengeance, i.e. for guests. My theory was, and still is to a large extent, that one concentrates more the first time through a recipe and tends to do it right; it's the second time through when complacency and, therefore, possible errors creep in.

More recently I've tended to cook tested recipes for guests, perhaps because I've become lazy at seeking out new material, though I was intending to revert to my old ways with this new recipe this past weekend. As fortune would have it, our numbers changed and so, so did my catering arrangements. However, I did try out this recipe using ourselves as guinea pigs and it has instantly shot into the charts as one of my favourites.

As usual, I found two slightly differing versions of this dish, one from *Casa Moro* and one from *Rick Stein's Spain* (which was, IMHO, his best TV programme after branching out from his fish mastery). What follows is inevitably a combination of the two. I commend it to the house!

Planning

serves:	4
prep time:	30 mins
cooking time:	2½hrs

Ingredients

6 tbs olive oil
8 fat cloves garlic skinned, 4 finely chopped, 4 left whole
30g sliced white bread (no crusts), cut into ~4cm squares
75gms whole unblanched almonds
1kg rindless pork shoulder, in ~2cm³/₄in cubes
1 tbs plain flour (for dusting)
1 large onion, finely chopped
1 large sprig fresh thyme
2 bay leaves (fresh, if possible)
1 tsp sweet paprika
½ tsp smoked paprika
400ml dry white wine
1 large tomato, halved & grated (discard the skin)
1 palmful fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
Salt & pepper

Method

You can cook this in a *cazuela* for authenticity but it needs to have a lid. Mine doesn't have a lid but if yours does, or you feel you can improvise, fine. Otherwise use a large skillet with a lid.

Heat a couple of tablespoons of olive oil in your chosen pan over moderate heat and fry the 4 whole cloves of garlic, the almonds and the chunks of bread. You want lightly golden as your finished colour, which takes about 2 minutes. Remove them from the oil and set aside.

Season your chunks of pork, then dust them with the flour. (I find a large plastic food bag just perfect for his kind of dusting operation.) Add an extra couple of tablespoons of oil to your pan and seal the cubes of pork on all sides without colouring them too much - they should remain quite pale. As they seal, remove them to a plate and set aside.

Add the remaining two tablespoons of oil to the pan and toss in the chopped onion, bay leaves and thyme. Cook for about 5 minutes to begin softening the onion before adding the chopped garlic. Cook this mixture for a further minute then stir in both paprikas and cook for a couple minutes more, being careful not to burn the spices. If it seems to be getting too hot or too dry, adjust the heat and/or the oil. Stir in the white wine and bubble to drive off the alcohol. [You might as well start drinking the rest of the bottle, if you haven't already. :D] Add the tomato mush and stir in a little salt and pepper. Cover and simmer gently for 2 hours.

[Continue drinking the remaining white wine.]

After two hours, [all the remaining white wine should have been drunk and] the meat should be nicely tender. Put the parsley leaves into a blender/liquidizer along with the

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browned and reserved whole garlic cloves, almonds and pieces of bread. Add a couple of ladlefuls of the cooking liquid and blitz to a paste. Stir this *picada* back into the pork, adjust the seasoning to taste and simmer very gently while you make some accompanying vegetables (15 minutes or so). Pick out the thyme stalk and bay leaves before serving.

[You'll need another bottle of wine to serve with it.]