

Baked Buttermilk-Brined Pork Chops

My wife, Nancy, combines salt and buttermilk to make fried chicken flavorful and juicy. She tried the brine on pork and found the results equally delicious. The brine helps to keep the chops moist and flavorful during baking, which may otherwise dry them out. Make sure to use chops that are at least 1¼ to 1½ inches thick. **SERVES 4**

Buttermilk Brine

3 cups buttermilk

⅔ cup kosher salt

1 tablespoon lemon zest

2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary

2 teaspoons chopped fresh sage or 1
teaspoon dried


4 T-bone or rib pork chops (each 1¼ to
1½ inches thick and 8 to 12 ounces)

2 teaspoons freshly ground black
pepper

Flour for coating

3 tablespoons olive oil, melted lard, or
bacon drippings

1 To brine the pork chops: Pour the buttermilk into a plastic storage container or stainless-steel bowl and stir in the salt until completely dissolved. Add the lemon zest, rosemary, and sage. Add the pork chops, making sure they are completely immersed in the brine. Cover and refrigerate for 3 to 4 hours. **2** Preheat the oven to 400° F. **3** Remove the chops from the brine and rinse off the buttermilk. Pat dry, season generously with the black pepper, and dredge each chop in the flour, shaking to remove the excess. Set the chops aside. **4** In a nonstick ovenproof skillet large enough to hold all the chops, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Put the chops in the pan and cook for 2 to 3 minutes or until nicely browned. Turn and cook 3 minutes more. Transfer the skillet to the oven and bake the chops for about 15 minutes or until they are firm to the touch or register 145° F on an instant-read thermometer inserted into the middle of a chop. **5** Remove the chops to a platter and let rest for 5 minutes before serving. Serve as is or with chutney.

CHEF'S NOTES: Instead of baking these buttermilk-brined chops, grill them. Omit the rinsing and flour dredging steps and grill over a medium-hot fire until nicely colored. Use chops that are at least 1¼ inches thick for the best results.  The buttermilk brine is also excellent for a 3-pound boneless pork loin roast, which will need an overnight soak. The next day, remove the loin, rinse it, and bake it to an internal temperature of 140° to 145° F, about 45 minutes. Let rest for 10 minutes before slicing and serving. Pork loin roast can also be seasoned with black pepper and fresh herbs (dill is particularly good) after it is rinsed.