

the juices settle to the bottom, about 15 minutes. Pour the fat (leaving the juices in the measuring cup) over the pork so it's completely covered by an inch of fat. Seal the container. Refrigerate for at least 2 weeks before serving and up to 2 months, making sure the pork is always completely immersed in fat. **6** Pour the juices remaining in the measuring cup into another container and save for another use (see Chef's Note). **7** To serve the pork, remove the chunks of meat from the fat and heat them in a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until lightly crisped. Serve as part of salad or with white beans or lentils.

CHEF'S NOTE: The meat juices from the pork confit can be refrigerated or frozen and used in vinaigrettes or other dishes to lend an intense porky flavor.

Lard—A Lot Healthier Than You Think

About 75 years or so ago, pigs were raised not only for their meat, but also for the fat they produced, familiarly known as lard. Lard was the primary source of cooking fat for many Americans, especially those with Eastern European, Latino, or Asian ethnic roots. In the early part of the twentieth century, manufactured vegetable shortenings (or fake fats) such as Crisco were invented and these products began to dominate the market. Lard continued to be used until the 1950s and early 1960s but research that saturated fats, i.e., animal fat, were bad for us and our hearts, in particular, made people turn away from lard. Well, the tide has turned. Fake fats like vegetable shortening and margarine, it turns out, are very bad for us. Because they're partially or wholly hydrogenated, they're packed with nasty trans-fatty acids. In a word, trans-fats are toxic and can contribute to heart disease by raising LDL and lowering HDL. Trans-fats inhibit insulin bonding to cells, which exacerbates insulin resistance and diabetes, and generally raise free radicals in the body—not a good thing for our health. Trans-fats are now considered enough of a health risk that they will soon be listed on labels, and, to my way of thinking, they should be avoided altogether.

The saturated fats with which lard and other animal fats are loaded are actually helpful in counteracting some of the negative effects of trans-fats. When I recommend lard, I'm not talking about those packaged bricks of "lard" sold in supermarkets, which are partially hydrogenated and highly processed and don't taste anything like real lard. Either you must make your own lard (page 313), or purchase it from a mail-order source (see Sources on page 318) or from an ethnic supplier where it is made fresh.