

If you're cooking some of the traditional dishes in this book that call for lard as a choice such as Pork Confit (page 310), Choucroute Garni (page 242), Pörkölt (page 226), or many of the Asian dishes, lard is the fat of choice. If you don't have homemade lard, my next choice would be bacon fat.

If you're now convinced about lard but don't know a friendly pig farmer or live in an area with a large Chinese or Mexican community, it's going to be difficult for you to find the pork back fat or kidney fat you need to make lard. However, you can mail-order back fat (see Sources on page 318), or you can trim off the fat from the loins, Boston butts, pork chops, etc., that you buy and stockpile it in your freezer. When you've amassed 5 pounds of fat or more, then follow the recipe for making lard (below). It's a very simple process.

## Rendering Lard MAKES ABOUT 3 QUARTS

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**1** Preheat the oven to 300° F. **2** Put the cubed fat in a large pot or Dutch oven, making sure that it's no more than half full. Slip into the oven and bake until the fat begins to melt. Stir the mixture and continue to stir every 45 minutes until the bits of fat (cracklings) brown and float to the top. It may take up to 4 hours to render the lard. Strain the lard into a clean container and ladle it into canning jars. When the jars have cooled, cover them and refrigerate. Lard will keep in the refrigerator for 6 months. **3** The cracklings are incredibly irresistible and I dare you not to eat them. Use them in Hot Water Cornbread with Cracklins (page 89), biscuits, or as a garnish on salads.

**6 pounds pork back fat,  
cut into ½-inch cubes**

**CHEF'S NOTE:** If you have a meat grinder and a strong arm, you can grind the back fat instead of dicing it, which will speed up the melting and rendering process.