

Stuffed Molasses-Brined Pork Chops

If you've been ambitious and have some homemade sausage in your fridge, this is a wonderful family dish to showcase your efforts. It's simple and satisfying, and the brined pork chops play perfectly against the sausage filling. Serve the chops on a plate with a salad of endive, frisée, and sliced apples tossed in a light vinaigrette. **SERVES 4**

1 To brine the pork: pour the water into a large bowl or plastic storage tub. Add the salt, brown sugar, molasses, and vanilla. Stir until the salt and sugar dissolve. Stir in the ice cubes to chill the mixture to 45° F or less. Add the pork chops, cover, and refrigerate for 4 to 6 hours.

2 Preheat the oven to 400° F. **3** Remove the pork chops from the brine and pat them dry with paper towels. At this point you can either proceed with the recipe or wrap the chops in plastic wrap. They can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 2 days before being cooked. **4** Combine the sausage and bread crumbs. **5** Cut a pocket in each chop parallel to the cut surface and fill with the sausage mixture. Sprinkle both sides of the chops with ground pepper. **6** In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Add 2 chops and sear on both sides until golden brown, about 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove and sear the remaining chops in the same manner. Place the chops in a baking dish (you could also use the same skillet if it has an ovenproof handle and can hold all the chops in one layer) and bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes. Turn the chops and cook for another 10 to 15 minutes or until the internal temperature of the sausage filling reaches 150° F on an instant-read thermometer. Remove the pan from the oven, put the chops on a platter, and let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

CHEF'S NOTE: You may also use Brown Sugar and Sage sausage (page 259), Italian-Style Sausage with Rosemary and Grappa (page 260), Toulouse Sausage (page 261), or Nancy's Artichoke and Piquillo Pepper Sausage (page 264) to stuff the chops.

Molasses Brine

3½ cups water

¼ cup kosher salt

3 tablespoons dark brown sugar

2 tablespoons molasses

¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1 cup ice cubes

4 bone-in rib pork chops (each 1¼ to 1½ inches thick; about 3 pounds total)

½ pound homemade bulk fresh sausage (see Chef's Note) or store-bought bulk sage sausage

¼ cup fresh bread crumbs

Freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons olive oil