Main dishes

Pernil (Puerto Rican Slow-Roasted Pork Shoulder)

A bone-in pork shoulder buried in garlic-sazón adobo and marinated for 24 hours, then roasted low and slow until the meat is fall-apart tender — then blasted high to transform the thick skin into the crunchy, shattering cuerito that is the most coveted part of the entire dish.

Time 600 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 3500 g Bone-in pork shoulder (picnic or Boston butt), skin-on
- ☐ 40 g Garlic cloves
- ☐ 12 g Dried oregano
- ☐ 30 g Fine sea salt
- ☐ 8 g Black pepper, coarsely ground
- ☐ 45 g White wine vinegar
- ☐ 40 g Olive oil
- ☐ 12 g Sazón (with achiote/culantro blend)
- ☐ 6 g Ground cumin
- ☐ 20 g Fresh cilantro with stems, roughly chopped
- ☐ 20 g Coarse sea salt (for skin)

Let's make it.

01 Using a pilón (mortar and pestle) or food processor, pound the garlic, oregano, salt, pepper, and cumin to a rough paste. Add vinegar and olive oil and mix to a thick, pungent adobo. Stir in the sazón and cilantro. The paste should be thick enough to press into incisions without falling out.

02 Score the skin in a crosshatch pattern, cutting through skin and fat but not meat. Using a thin, sharp knife, make 20–30 deep incisions all over the meat (under and around the skin flap) and push a generous amount of adobo into each with your finger. Rub remaining adobo all over the meat. Rub coarse salt all over the skin only. Place in a roasting pan, skin-side up, uncovered, in the refrigerator for 24–36 hours.

03 Place pork skin-side up on a rack in a deep roasting pan. Add 2 cups of water to the pan bottom. Cover tightly with foil. Roast at 160 C (325 F) for 5–6 hours (approximately 1.5 hours per kilogram). The pork is done when an instant-read thermometer reads 90 C (195 F) at the thickest part — this temperature ensures all collagen has converted to gelatin.

04 Remove the foil and increase oven to 230 C (450 F). Roast uncovered for 30–45 minutes, watching constantly, until the skin bubbles and shatters into golden cuerito (crackling). Rotate the pan every 10 minutes. The skin should go from pale and steamed to blistered and golden — listen for the crackling, popping sound.

05 Rest uncovered for 15 minutes. Carve by pulling the meat in large chunks with two forks — pernil should not be sliced, it should be pulled. Keep the cuerito intact and break it into pieces separately, distributing equitably. Serve with arroz con gandules and tostones.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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