Main dishes / Mexico

Pork Carnitas

Michoacán's definitive taco filling — pork shoulder braised slowly in its own rendered lard with orange, cinnamon, bay, and garlic until meltingly tender, then fried in that same fat until the edges shatter into mahogany-brown crackle while the center stays irresistibly juicy.

Time 195 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 1000 g Pork shoulder (boston butt, cut into large 6cm chunks)
- ☐ 250 g Lard (manteca de cerdo)
- ☐ 1 whole Orange (1 large — halved, juice squeezed, shells reserved)
- ☐ 0.5 whole White onion (quartered)
- ☐ 5 cloves Garlic cloves (whole, smashed)
- ☐ 3 leaves Bay leaves
- ☐ 1 piece Mexican cinnamon stick (canela, one small piece)
- ☐ 30 g Sweetened condensed milk (Michoacán tradition)
- ☐ 18 g Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Pat the pork chunks thoroughly dry with paper towels — surface moisture is the enemy of both rendering and browning. Toss generously with the salt until every surface carries a visible, even coating. Leave at room temperature for 20 minutes while you gather the aromatics. The salt draws the barest trace of moisture to the surface, then the surface dries: this tack helps the lard cling and the seasonings penetrate.

02 Nestle the pork chunks in a single layer in a heavy wide pot or Dutch oven. Add the lard, then squeeze the orange juice over the top and drop in the spent orange shell halves. Tuck in the onion, garlic, bay leaves, and cinnamon stick. Add just enough cold water to come level with the top of the meat — the water will cook off first, and when it does, the lard takes over. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook uncovered on the lowest heat, never letting it boil, for 1.5 to 2 hours. The water gradually evaporates over the first hour; the pork then quietly poaches in clear lard for the second hour until fork-tender.

03 Once the water is fully gone and the pork sits in clear lard, raise the heat to medium-high. If using condensed milk, drizzle it in now and stir — the trace of dairy sugar accelerates browning in the authentic Michoacán way. Cook, turning the pieces only every 3 to 4 minutes, until deeply browned and crisp at all the exposed edges and high points. The fat will bubble vigorously around the pieces. Resist the urge to stir constantly — extended contact between meat and hot metal is what builds the crust. Total frying time 8 to 15 minutes.

04 Transfer the carnitas to a large cutting board and let them rest 5 minutes. The resting is important — the residual heat finishes any remaining pink interior, and the crust sets rather than steaming back soft. Using two forks or your fingers, roughly pull and chop each piece into a mix of large crispy shards and tender shreds. Spoon a tablespoon of the warm reserved lard back over the top to gloss them. Taste and season with a pinch of flaky salt and a squeeze of fresh lime. Serve immediately on warm corn tortillas with white onion, cilantro, lime, and your salsa of choice.

Recipe & provenance ForkRecipe Kitchen / ForkRecipe / FoodML and contributors / CC BY-SA 4.0.
Original recipe and attribution CC BY-SA 4.0
Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
recipes.dvs-services.be / pork-carnitas