



Trends: Brining

Brining has been a restaurant secret for years. A simple mixture of salt and water helps chefs deliver tender, juicy pork. Historically used to preserve food, today it's used to improve the texture and juiciness of lean cuts, and the flavor of thicker cuts of meat.

Brining meat adds moisture to meat through osmosis. When meat is placed in brine, the meat's cell fluids are less concentrated than the salt water in the brining solution. Water flows out of the cells in the meat and salt flows in. The salt dissolves some of the fiber proteins, and the meat's cell fluids become more concentrated, drawing water back in. Brining traps moisture and flavor in the meat and produces a delicious, tender menu item that customers will order again and again.

While brine originated as a simple mix of water and salt, chefs began adding seasonings and other ingredients to impart new flavors to food. It began with sweet additions, like sugar, brown sugar, molasses, honey and maple. Bruce Aidells and Denis Kelly coined the term "flavor brining" in their *The Complete Meat Cookbook*, and now seasonings of all sorts are used in brining.

Pork is perfect for brining, especially the pork chop. It provides a versatile, flavorful canvas, and benefits from sweet brines with honey and fruit juices as well as savory brines featuring bay leaves, pickled herbs, garlic and coriander. Many casual restaurants and gastropubs use beer and spirits like bourbon, sake, vermouth, whiskey and brandy for their brines. Pork's popularity in international cuisine means it's ideal for brining with flavorful global ingredients.

After years as a chef's secret weapon, brines are finally getting their moment in the spotlight. Anne Burrell, on The Food Network's "Secrets of a Restaurant Chef," provided her recipe for brining grilled pork chops. She uses water, salt, sugar, fennel seed, coriander seed, crushed red pepper flakes, bay leaves, onion, diced carrots, diced celery and garlic for her pork chop with wild fennel pollen and soft parmigiano polenta. The Girl & the Fig in Sonoma uses a brine of water, salt, thyme, coriander, fennel seed, chili flakes, black peppercorns, garlic powder and sugar for their Grilled Pork Chop with Roasted Garlic and Rosemary-Potato Gratin.

Now that the secret's out, here are five trends to watch:

1. *Sweet and Sassy*: Sweet brines are hallmarks of menus across the country. The historic Mono Inn near the Sierra Madre mountains offers up a maple-brined pork chop using water, salt, maple syrup, Dijon mustard, red pepper flakes, juniper berries, cloves, rosemary, thyme, garlic and fresh ginger. It's served with a



quinoa pilaf and a roasted pear or apple chutney. Stella 12 Beech in Oxford, Ohio, uses a citrus brine for its 12-ounce grilled pork porterhouse which they serve with sweet potato-poblano mashed potatoes and pineapple salsa. Farmstead in St. Helena, California brines its Berkshire pork chop with water, salt, orange peel, star anise, all spice, cinnamon and coriander and serves it with braised

greens, yam puree and apple butter.

2. *Brines & BBQ*: Barbecue restaurants are known for sauces, but they also use brines to help deliver flavor and tenderness. While not traditionally used with ribs and shoulder cuts, most barbecue

restaurants will brine chops, even when using a smoker. Wolf's BBQ in Evansville, Indiana brines chops with a bourbon base featuring water, salt, onion, bay leaves, a cinnamon stick, black peppercorns, allspice berries, cloves, brown sugar, walnuts and hazelnuts. Mike and Ed's in Tuscaloosa, Alabama has a basic brine to complement their sauce, made with salt, water, vinegar and lemon juice. The Peninsula Grill in Charleston features a brine of water, salt, sugar, celery seed, bay leaves, onion, garlic and peppercorns and serves up a double-cut pork chop with



peppered collard greens and barbecue jus. And Famous Dave's is known for their pork chop brine made with water, salt, garlic, Famous Dave's Rib Rub, honey, chipotle in adobo, and pepper.

3. *Raise Your Spirits:* Beer and spirits are hot in brining. Chefs are spiking brines to give pork a little kick. The Ritz Carlton in Marana, Arizona serves up an applejack-brined pork chop with roasted peppers, herb and queso fresca polenta, brussels sprouts and bacon. Noted chef Gray Kunz of New York serves a pork chop made with a bourbon mustard brine featuring water, salt, whiskey, Dijon, paprika and honey. Tequila is the base for the brine at



Gabrielle's in Centerbrook, Connecticut. The brine is made with water, salt, tequila, cider vinegar, cumin, brown sugar, sage and thyme and is served with cilantro-

pepita pesto, winter greens, roasted poblano and goat cheese mashed potatoes.

4. *Not Just Seasonal, but Regional:* Brines are the perfect way to enhance regional flavors. New Orleans' Susan Spicer, a National Pork Board Celebrated Chef Alumnus, is famous for her Herbsaint-brined Pork Chops served with onion confit and pomegranate molasses. Kabooz's in New York City serves up a Southern-influenced honey-brined Pork Chop marinated in a honey brine and served with a Creole mustard gravy, Cajun mashed potatoes and sautéed spinach. Jack's Gourmet in Columbia, Missouri



serves up a brown sugar-brined and grilled chop with bacon braised red cabbage and mashed herb potatoes. Maverick Southern Kitchen in Charleston and

Greenville, South Carolina are serving a regional twist on brining a sweet tea-brined pork with a roasted beet salad.

5. *Brines Go Global:* With interest in international foods growing, brines are becoming more creative and interesting. Mai Pham of Star Ginger in Sacramento used the nuttiness, saltiness and lactic tang of whey to brine her pork. She adds thyme, garlic and lemon peel and serves her whey-brined pork with roasted mushrooms



and onions, creamy polenta, chives and Madeira-Calvados-prune sauce. Cindy Hutson, another National Pork Board Celebrated Chef and owner of Ortanique in Coral Gables, Fla., is famous for her Jerked Pork Chop with Guava Seven Tiki Spice Rum Sauce and South American Moros. She starts her signature dish with a citrus brine comprised of water,

salt, garlic, onion, oregano, coriander, cumin, orange, lemon, lemon and honey.

From fruit and honey to beer and bourbon, inventive brine ingredients are the key to creative flavors and consumer satisfaction. Brining ensures the juiciest, most tender pork chops and adds layers of flavor to complement the final dish.