

Roast Belly of Pork with Apple Sauce

Serves about 8

Ingredients:

The thick end of the belly (last 6 ribs)
Fresh thyme leaves
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the apple sauce:

3–4 large Bramley apples
A squeeze of lemon juice
Grated zest (no pith) and juice of 1/2 orange
1–2 tablespoons caster sugar (to taste)

Method:

Score the skin of the belly with a sharp knife (a Stanley knife is surprisingly handy) and rub with salt, pepper and fresh thyme leaves, getting the seasoning and herbs right into the cracks. Roast in a hot oven (220°C/Gas Mark 7) for 30 minutes, then turn the oven down to 180°C/Gas Mark 4 and cook for roughly another hour, until the juices run clear when the meat is pierced with a skewer and the crackling has crackled to an irresistible golden brown. If the crackling is reluctant, whack up the heat again, as high as you like, and check every few minutes till it's done.

To make the sauce, peel, core and slice the Bramleys, tossing them with the lemon juice as you go. Put them in a pan with the orange zest and juice and a first sprinkling of sugar. Cook gently until the apples break up into a rough purée, then check for sweetness and adjust to your taste. Keep warm (or reheat gently to serve).

Remove the crackling from the pork before carving, then cut the joint into thick slices. Serve each person one or two slices with a good piece of crackling, and bring the apple sauce to the table. I like to serve this with mashed potatoes, not roast, as there's already plenty of fat and crispiness on the plate. Some simple, lightly steamed greens such as Savoy cabbage, spinach or curly kale, will help to ease your conscience as you lap up the lard.