



PICKLED PORK OR MEAT

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Pickle Meat or Pickled Pork

Before the days of refrigeration and commercial curing plants, Pickle Meat or Pickled Pork was a staple in the Creole Kitchen. From what I understand, it's still fairly easy to find in New Orleans. Some people will not make Red Beans and Rice without it, and I have to say, the best pot of Red Beans that I've made, was made with Pickled Pork. The meat is so tender from the brine, that it just breaks down in the pot, leaving behind all of that wonderful flavor. It's a cinch to make, now that we don't have to do 25 lb. batches. Long ago the pork from a very recently butchered hog would be cured in large batches, and kept in barrels. Here is what The Picayune's Creole Cookbook of 1901 had to say on the subject, along with the process:

Pork should be pickled about twenty hours after killing. It is pickled always in sufficient quantity to last for some time, for if proper care is taken, it will keep one year after pickling; but it may also be pickled in small quantities of three or four pounds at a time, reducing other ingredients in the recipe according to quantity of pork used. To twenty-five pounds of Pork allow one ounce of saltpetre. Pulverize thoroughly and mix with a sufficient quantity of salt to thoroughly salt the pork. Cut the Pork into pieces of about two pounds, and slash each piece through the skin, and then rub thoroughly with the salt and saltpetre mixture till the meat is thoroughly penetrated through and through. Mash the cloves very fine and grind the allspice; chop the onions. Take a small barrel and place at the bottom a layer of salt, then a layer of coarsely chopped onions, and sprinkle over this a layer of the spices and minced bay leaves. Place on this a layer of Pork; pack tightly; then place above this a layer of salt and seasonings, and continue with alternate layers of Pork and seasonings until the Pork is used up. Conclude with a layer of the minced herbs and spices and have a layer of salt on top. Cover the preparation with a board on which a heavy weight must be placed to press down the meat. It will be ready for use in ten or twelve days.

Here is a more modern version, which is more of a brine than the version in the old text. I love the slight acidic flavor that it lends to a pot of Red Beans.

Pickled Pork or Pickle Meat Recipe

2 lbs. Very Fresh Pork Cut into 2 inch cubes (Pork Shoulder or Boston Butt)
1 Qt. White Vinegar
1/2 Cup Mustard Seed
6 Each Whole Cloves
6 Each Whole Allspice
1/2 tsp Crushed Red Pepper
3 Fresh Bay Leaves
6 Whole Garlic Cloves
1/2 of a Medium Onion, Coarsely Chopped
1 Tbsp Kosher Salt
1 Tbsp Black Peppercorns
1 pinch Pink Meat Cure or Prague Powder

Add all the ingredients except the Pork to a 2 qt Saucepan. Bring to a boil. Boil for 3-4 minutes, then place it into a container to cool in the refrigerator. When the mixture is completely cold, add the pork. Make sure the pork is completely covered; stir to make remove any air bubbles. Cover and place in the refrigerator for 4 days before using.

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PICKLE MEAT - (Creole Pickled Pork)

Pickled pork, or "pickle meat", as it's called in New Orleans, is what some folks consider the quintessential seasoning meat for red beans and rice, as well as other bean dishes. Some folks use ham hocks, some smoked ham, some even use tasso. But you'll find a significant number of Creole mamas who'll tell you that it ain't red beans without pickle meat. It's readily available at many New Orleans markets, but you can make it yourself:

2 pounds boneless pork butt, cut into 2-inch cubes
1 quart distilled white vinegar
1/2 cup mustard seed
1-tablespoon celery seed
2 tablespoons Tabasco sauce
1 bay leaf
6 cloves garlic, peeled and cracked (not smashed)
1-tablespoon kosher salt
12 peppercorns

Combine everything except the pork in a non-reactive saucepan and boil for three minutes. Cool and place in a refrigerator container (plastic, glass or stainless-steel) and add the pork. Stir to remove bubbles. Cover and refrigerate for three days.

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