INDIRECT · MEDIUM

Beer-Braised Pork Knuckle in the Kamado: Cast-Iron Pot and Crackling

The pork knuckle of the Russian New Year table, the rulka, in two stages: 2.5 to 3 hours braising in a cast-iron pot with beer at 150 °C, then a dry finish at 230 °C so the skin blisters and crackles.



PREP	COOK	SERVINGS	TEMPERATURE
25 min	230 min	4	150 °C

Ingredients

- **2 ud** hind pork knuckles (codillos traseros) with skin, 1-1.2 kg each
- **2 ud** large onions, in wedges
- **5 g** caraway seeds
- **10 ud** black peppercorns
- **2 cda** wholegrain mustard, for the sauce and for serving
- **1 l** amber lager (märzen style) or dark beer, at room temperature
- **1 ud** head of garlic, halved
- **3 ud** bay leaves
- **30 g** coarse salt, divided between the meat and the skin
- **500 g** sauerkraut, to serve

Method

1 PREPARE THE KNUCKLES

Pat the knuckles dry and rub them with two thirds of the coarse salt, mostly on the cut end. Lay them head to tail in the empty pot, nothing underneath (the thick end of one by the tip of the other), and put the lid on. If they are too long, ask the butcher to saw off the tip of the bone. If the lid will not sit because they are too tall, this pot cannot take them: use smaller front knuckles and go by the probe. Leave them out 20-30 minutes while you light up.

2 LIGHT AND SET UP INDIRECT

Fill the firebox of the Konnected Joe with Jealous Devil quebracho lump above the air holes, almost to the rim: that is almost four hours and a final climb to 230 °C with no refuelling. Use big pieces and do not pack them down. Place the two ceramic deflectors on the lower level of the Divide & Conquer and the grate above them. Light with the button on the panel and set 150 °C. Wait until the temperature settles and the smoke runs thin and clean before putting the pot in.

3 ASSEMBLE THE POT

In the Overmont pot, at room temperature, lay the knuckles straight on the base and spread the onion wedges, the head of garlic, the bay, the pepper and the caraway around them. Pour the beer in at one side, without wetting the top, until it covers roughly a third of the height of the knuckles. The top of the skin stays above the liquid throughout the braise; the skin underneath softens and dries out in the second stage. If 1 l does not reach that height, top up with water.

4 BRAISE WITH THE LID ON

Open the kamado with burping: lift the lid about 5 cm, wait about 5 seconds and then open fully, wearing gloves. Set the lidded pot in the centre of the grate, close up and let the fan hold 150 °C for 2 hours without opening. The liquid stays at a gentle simmer inside the pot even though the chamber is at 150 °C. After that time, burp the kamado again and lift the lid off the pot, wearing gloves.

5 UNCOVER AND CHECK THE COLLAGEN

Carry on with the pot uncovered at 150 °C for another 30 to 60 minutes: the skin starts to dry and the liquid concentrates. At 2.5 hours in total, push the DOQAUS thermometer into the thickest part next to the bone, without touching it. You want 93-96 °C and, above all, a probe that goes in without resistance. If the probe still meets resistance, give it another 20-30 minutes and measure again. Do not go past 3.5 hours without checking the liquid level.

6 DRY AND SCORE THE SKIN

Lift the knuckles out with tongs and a slotted spoon onto a tray, and take the pot out of the kamado onto a wooden trivet. Set 230 °C on the panel and open the top vent so it climbs. Dry the skin with kitchen paper, score it with a Stanley knife in 1.5 cm diamonds without reaching the meat, taking advantage of how the braise has softened it, and rub it with the rest of the salt. Strain the liquid from the pot and keep it.

7 CRACKLING AT 230 °C

With the chamber steady at 230 °C, open with burping and set the knuckles straight on the grate, skin up, with a metal tray on the deflectors to catch the drips. Close up and leave for 30-40 minutes, until the skin puffs into blisters and sounds hollow when tapped with the tongs. Check at 20 minutes, always burping, and turn the joint if one side browns faster. Honey, beer and mustard never touch the skin.

8 SAUCE, REST AND SERVE

While the skin crisps, reduce the strained liquid over a high heat in the kitchen, 10-15 minutes, until it is halved, and bind it with a spoonful of mustard. Rest the knuckles for 10 minutes on a rack, not on a platter, so the skin does not go damp underneath. Serve one knuckle between two people, with the sauce on the side, warm sauerkraut and more mustard.

Editor's tips

- The braising stage can be done the day before: move the knuckles and the strained liquid out of the pot into shallow containers and get them into the fridge within 2 hours, as the USDA advises. The next day, heat the knuckles in the lidded pot with a little of the liquid at 150 °C until the centre is above 74 °C, the USDA figure for reheating leftovers, then dry them and do the skin stage at 230 °C.
- If at 40 minutes the skin has not fully puffed, raise the set point to 250 °C for 10 minutes and keep watch. Every time you open at that temperature, burp: about 5 cm, about 5 seconds, then fully.
- Avoid heavily hopped IPAs: as the base reduces, the hop bitterness concentrates and the sauce turns harsh. An amber lager or a mild dark beer gives a slightly sweet base that suits the caraway.
- The pot goes into the kamado at room temperature with the chamber at 150 °C, a moderate jump for cast iron. What it must not get is cold water while hot, or a sudden change when it comes out: never cool it down in the sink. When lifting it out, use two hands, gloves and the wooden trivet set ready beforehand.

Gear for this recipe

Kamado Joe Konnected Joe

This recipe has two very different set points, 150 °C for three hours of braising and 230 °C for the skin, and the Konnected Joe holds each one with its fan, which the maker rates for a range of 107 to 371 °C. That removes the tedious part: no need to go down and adjust the bottom vent every half hour while the pot works. It comes with the two ceramic deflectors and the two-level Divide & Conquer as standard, which is exactly the indirect set-up the knuckle needs in both stages, and it lights with a button, no firelighters. Its grate is the 46 cm of the Classic format, where a 29.7 cm pot fits across. The trade-off: it needs a power socket nearby and adds electronics to an appliance that will live outdoors.

mikamado.es/en/kamados/kamado-joe-konnected-joe

Jealous Devil 100% White Quebracho lump charcoal 15.8 kg

Almost four hours of lit kamado, first at 150 °C and then at 230 °C, with no opening to refuel: that calls for a charcoal that lasts and does not crumble to dust. The white quebracho from Jealous Devil is a very dense South American hardwood, and in big pieces it leaves gaps for air to pass right to the end of the cook, which matters in a fan-driven kamado, where forced air has to reach all the embers. The firebox is filled once, almost to the rim, and the climb from 150 to 230 °C for the skin comes from the charcoal that is already lit. The bag is 15.8 kg, so it covers several long cooks like this one.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/jealous-devil-quebracho-lump-charcoal

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Overmont Dutch Oven-L: 6.3 L, 29.7 cm cast-iron Dutch oven

The first stage of the knuckle is a stew inside the kamado, and the 6.3 L Overmont pot is the vessel: lidded cast iron, 29.7 cm across and 36 cm from handle to handle according to its images, so it fits across a 46 cm grate. Its mass of iron holds the beer at a gentle simmer and the heavy lid keeps the steam in. Its listing rates it up to 250 °C, far above the 150 °C of the braise. Two drawbacks. It is shallow inside: 6.3 L over 29.7 cm gives about 9 cm of depth, so a dry run with the knuckles, the lid on and the dome closed is a must. And it weighs 6.21 kg empty: gloves and two hands. One more: it is not enamelled and its listing says it rusts if not dried, so for a long wet braise strain the liquid as soon as the knuckles come out, wash, dry over the heat and wipe on oil (more in the description).

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/overmont-dutch-oven-hierro-fundido-6-3l

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DOQAUS instant-read thermometer, folding probe, 3-second read

With a pork knuckle the clock misleads: two pieces of the same weight can differ by half an hour, and what decides it is whether the collagen has melted. The DOQAUS thermometer answers that question with one stab next to the bone, without touching it: look for 93-96 °C and, above all, for the probe going in like butter. It is a food probe: it is not left inside the kamado with the dome closed, nor is it for measuring the chamber.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/doqaus-termometro-instantaneo-plegable

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Full recipe at: mikamado.es/en/recetas/codillo-cerdo-cerveza-asado-lento-kamado

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