

WOLFGANG PUCK'S KITCHEN:

Two Resolutions In One By Wolfgang Puck

The holiday parties are over. It's time to call it a new year and face the fact that we have probably already broken most of those resolutions we made.

But let me offer you a ray of hope, one that shines twice as brightly because it offers you the chance to start fulfilling two resolutions at once.

Chances are you resolved to lose weight this year. There's also a strong likelihood that you decided to try to cook and enjoy more meals at home, a smart way not only to save money but also to build a greater sense of family togetherness.

Please let me observe, then, that cooking dinner at home can offer you an ideal way to control your diet.

Article after article in newspapers and magazines has explained how America's growing weight problems are worsened by a steady diet of fast food, served in huge portions packed with fat, sugar and salt. When you cook for yourself, however, you can control what you eat more easily, while finding other, more healthful ways to add satisfying flavor to every bite.

Health-conscious home-cooked meals can be packed with flavor and satisfaction, as my recipe here demonstrates. The pork chops you find in markets today, for a start, are remarkably lean. Trim away any excess fat from their edges before cooking, too.

There are several smart ways to add loads of flavor to those chops without adding too much fat or salt. First, give the chops a richly caramelized surface by searing them in just a little oil and butter (no need to deprive yourself com-

pletely!). This also creates concentrated, flavorful deposits on the bottom of the pan, which you can use as the foundation for a delicious sauce.

To dissolve, or "deglaze," the deposits, I like to add a lively mixture of balsamic vinegar, sherry and chicken broth. Try other deglazing liquids that you think will work well, such as wine, citrus juice or maybe a touch of soy sauce. Once you've stirred and scraped the deposits to deglaze them, you'll simmer the liquid to reduce its volume, thus intensifying the flavors and giving the resulting sauce a more luscious consistency. (Be sure to check your supermarket's shelves for good-quality chicken broth that isn't too salty, since the salt will become more prominent as the liquid reduces.)

Not so long ago, most people would have wanted to serve such a dish with noodles or rice to soak up all that good sauce. In this recipe, I've substituted quickly braised cabbage, the perfect complement for today's carbohydrate-conscious eaters. It's just one more example of how smart home cooking can slim both your body and your budget!

PORK CHOPS WITH BRAISED CABBAGE AND BALSAMIC SHERRY SAUCE

Serves 4

4 center-cut pork chops, each about 1 inch thick

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons safflower oil

3 tablespoons unsalted butter

7/8 cup balsamic vinegar

1/3 cup dry sherry

2 cups good-quality canned chicken broth

4 strips lean bacon, cut crosswise in 1/4-inch pieces

3/4 pound cabbage, cut into thin julienne strips

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

1/4 cup peeled, seeded, and chopped tomato

2 teaspoons minced fresh chives

Season both sides of the pork chops with salt and pepper.

Heat a large, heavy saute pan over medium heat. Add the oil and then half of the butter. As soon as the butter melts, add the pork chops and saute them until slightly pink inside, about 5 minutes per side.

Transfer the chops to a heated platter and pour off the excess fat from the pan. Add half of the vinegar and all of the sherry and stir and scrape the pan over medium heat to deglaze the pan deposits. Add the chicken broth and, over medium heat, boil until the sauce has reduced and thickened slightly. Remove from the heat and keep warm.

Meanwhile, in a separate saute pan over medium heat, saute the bacon until crisp. Spoon off all but 2 tablespoons of the bacon fat; add the remaining vinegar and stir and scrape to deglaze the pan. Add the cabbage, raise the heat to high, and

stir until the shreds are heated through and wilted, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Return the pan of sauce to medium heat and whisk in the Dijon mustard and remaining butter.

Divide the cabbage among heated serving plates. Place a pork chop on each bed of cabbage and spoon the sauce around and over each chop. Garnish with chopped tomatoes and sprinkle with chives.

(Chef Wolfgang Puck's TV series, "Wolfgang Puck's Cooking Class," airs Sundays on the Food Network. His latest cookbook, "Wolfgang Puck Makes It Easy," is now available in bookstores.

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