

Celebration Of Carnitas

Carnitas are a savory and delicious Mexican dish known for their flavorful and tender crispy pieces of pork. Carnitas means “little meats” in Spanish. Carnitas is a dish prepared by slow braising various cuts of the pork in its own fat or lard, a culinary technique called “confit.”

Authentic carnitas are very simple. Mexicans use salt, lard, and pork meat. In the U.S., there are many variations. Fortunately, it is possible to make carnitas that taste very similar to authentic pork carnitas without a lot of lard. Today, you can find recipes for carnitas cooked in the pressure cooker, oven, or slow cooker. Just pick your favorite method of cooking.

Traditional pork carnitas use pork shoulder or pork butt in the recipe. Because of the high-fat marbling, a pork butt allows the meat to create the best flavor and stay tender as it cooks. A leaner pork meat cut, like a loin, will not create the same flavor or texture. I prefer to buy the skinless, boneless pork butt roast.

Carnitas seasoning is a blend of spices that flavor the pork as it cooks. The ingredients in ready-to-use and homemade carnitas seasoning contain a mix of salt, black pepper, onion or onion powder, oregano, cumin, garlic or garlic powder, and chili powder. The result is an aromatic and savory flavor that complements the richness of the pork.

Recipes for carnitas combine the seasonings with a citric acid component, usually citrus juices like orange, lime, or orange peel. Lime and orange juices are key for tenderizing and balancing the other flavors of the meat.

Commonly used aromatics include onion and garlic. Cooking the aromatic ingredients in oil or fat allows them to soften and release their essential flavors, creating a layer of flavor in the dish.

The pork is braised or simmered for several hours with seasonings and lard until it is so tender that it can be shredded. After being shredded, the tender pork gets crispy and caramelized by roasting. Don't skip this step! This is the key to making this the best pork carnitas outside of Mexico.

There are two ways to make carnitas crispy - oven and stovetop:

In the oven: On a baking sheet, spread the shredded pork into an even layer. Pour one cup of the reserved liquid on top of the meat. Broil for 5 to 10 minutes or until crispy and golden brown on the edges.

On the stovetop: Over medium-high heat, add a tablespoon or two of oil to a large skillet. Transfer the shredded pork, and let it cook for about 5 minutes until the bottom is browned. Toss the pork for another 5 to 7 minutes until the edges are crispy.

Carnitas are very versatile. You can put the pork in burritos, enchiladas, quesadillas, tacos, and tamales, or use it as a topping for nachos! Carnitas are served over warm tortillas with a simple garnish of finely chopped raw onion, cilantro, and salsa. If desired, top with sliced avocado and sour cream or crema fresca.

If you know you'll have leftovers, shred the pork, but don't crisp it. Then, store pork and juice in separate airtight containers in the fridge for up to 3 days or in freezer-safe bags/containers in the freezer for up to 3 months.

You are missing out if you've never had Mexican pork carnitas. Satisfy your cravings for a hearty and delicious Mexican meal by making a batch of pork carnitas.

(Sources: www.allrecipes.com; cafedelites.com; www.mexicoinmykitchen.com, <https://www.tastingtable.com>)