

pork belly for ramen, pork buns & just about anything else

MAKES ENOUGH PORK FOR 6 TO 8 BOWLS OF RAMEN OR ABOUT 12 PORK BUNS

The best part of this belly, besides the unctuous, fatty meat itself, which we use in two of our most popular dishes at the restaurants—ramen and pork buns—is the layer that settles at the bottom of the pan after you chill it. Most cooks who are familiar with it know it from making duck confit, and they know it’s liquid gold (or jellied gold, if you want to get technical). We label containers of it “pork jelly.” I add it to broths, to taré, to vegetable sautés—anything that would benefit from a hit of meaty flavor and the glossier mouthfeel the gelatin adds.

To harvest it, decant the fat and juices from the pan you cooked the belly in into a glass measuring cup or other clear container. Let it cool until the fat separates from the meat juices, which will settle to the bottom. Pour or scoop off the fat and reserve it for cooking. Save the juices, which will turn to a ready-to-use meat jelly after a couple of hours in the fridge. The meat jelly will keep for 1 week in the refrigerator or indefinitely in the freezer.

We get pork belly without the skin. If you can only find skin-on belly, don’t fret. If the meat is cold and your knife is sharp, the skin is a cinch to slice off. And you can save it to make the Chicharrón (page 231) we serve as a first bite at Momofuku Ko.

One 3-pound slab skinless
pork belly

¼ cup kosher salt

¼ cup sugar

1. Nestle the belly into a roasting pan or other oven-safe vessel that holds it snugly. Mix together the salt and sugar in a small bowl and rub the mix all over the meat; discard any excess salt-and-sugar mixture. Cover the container with plastic wrap and put it into the fridge for at least 6 hours, but no longer than 24.

2. Heat the oven to 450°F.

3. Discard any liquid that accumulated in the container. Put the belly in the oven, fat side up, and cook for 1 hour, basting it with the rendered fat at the halfway point, until it’s an appetizing golden brown.

4. Turn the oven temperature down to 250°F and cook for another 1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes, until the belly is tender—it shouldn’t be falling apart, but it should have a down pillow-like yield to a firm finger poke. Remove the pan from the oven and transfer the belly to a plate. Decant the fat and the meat juices from the pan and reserve (see the headnote). Allow the belly to cool slightly.

5. When it’s cool enough to handle, wrap the belly in plastic wrap or aluminum foil and put it in the fridge until it’s thoroughly chilled and firm. (You can skip this step if you’re pressed for time, but the only way to get neat, nice-looking slices is to chill the belly thoroughly before slicing it.)

6. Cut the pork belly into ½-inch-thick slices that are about 2 inches long. Warm them for serving in a pan over medium heat, just for a minute or two, until they are jiggly soft and heated through. Use at once.