

Safe Handling and Cooking of Roaster Pigs Committee
Articles and Studies Used to Develop Guidance

A Beginner's Guide to Roasting a Whole Pig (PDF provided as some government computers block the link)

<http://globetrotterdiaries.com/recipes/a-beginners-guide-to-roasting-a-whole-pig>

Before Roasting a Pig, the Pros Advise Food Safety Homework (PDF provided)

Charcoal – How to Roast a Pig

<https://broadwaypartyrental.com/wp-content/uploads/Pig-Roasting-Charcoal.pdf>

Foodborne Illness Associated with a Pig Roast

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30978824>

Globalization and Epidemiology of Foodborne Disease (pages 4-7)

https://books.google.com/books?id=KTA0AAAAQBAJ&pg=PA5&lpg=PA5&dq=todd+ewen+guide+to+foodborne+pathogens&source=bl&ots=Ovr-cr_NgFo&sig=ACfU3U3-8mcbxdc7yjSOe7_S8xGISJtf4Q&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjBv7T50L_IAhWouVkkHQ2oCOUO6AEwAnoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=todd%20ewen%20guide%20to%20foodborne%20pathogens&f=false

Going Whole Hog: What You Need to Know to Roast a Hog or Suckling Pig

<https://amazingribs.com/tested-recipes/pork-recipes/going-whole-hog-what-you-need-know>

How to Cook a Whole Pig

<https://www.wikihow.com/Cook-a-Whole-Pig>

How to Roast a Pig in the Ground, Hawaiian Style

<https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/how-to-cook-a-pig-in-the-ground-hawaiian-style/>

How to Prep, Brine and Roast a Pig in a Caja China

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How to Roast a Whole Pig: It's Easier Than You Think

<https://www.post-gazette.com/life/food/2011/09/01/How-to-roast-a-whole-pig-it-s-easier-than-you-think/stories/201109010430>

How to Roast a Whole Pig: You'll Need Time, Average Cooking Skills – And a Mop

<https://www.twincities.com/2017/10/17/how-to-roast-a-whole-pig-hog-grill-dry-rub-barbecue-sauce-carolina-vinegar/>

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A Beginner's Guide To Roasting A Whole Pig

by Karen on ~~Monday, June 20, 2011~~

It all started like most of my conversations with people. One night I was at my friends Mike and Ofelia's house sitting around the kitchen chit-chatting about food. Mike, who has the job I only dream of (he's a chef), and I talked through the night about different methods of cooking a whole pig. Before the night was over, permission to destroy the lawn was given by my lovely friend Ofelia and a deal was struck. We were going to try what everyone aspires to do one day: roast a whole pig. Well, at least everyone I know.

Valerie was soon on board with us and we set the date, invited some people to help eat, and started our research. This was new territory for me and Mike so a lot of books, blogs and friends were consulted. Many methods of cooking were available to us as we realized that people around the world have discovered incredible and diverse ways to cook pig. However, one of the first options we nixed was the “buried pig” method. A large fire is burned in a deep pit lined with lava rocks or bricks for hours, heating the earth. The fire is put out, the pig is lowered and the hole is covered and sealed completely, using the residual heat to cook the pig through. Because of a seeming lack of control over the heat (which is extremely important when it comes to barbeque) we decided that this was not the best option for beginners. Besides, I'm not sure how the neighbors would've felt about an enormous bonfire one yard over.

The Caja China, a pre-made wooden box that produces [lechón](#)-style pork, was recommended many times but after considering the cost, we decided to forego the investment– they're not cheap. We decided to consider purchasing it if our first roast turned out well.

The third and best option for us was a cinder-block barbeque. A rectangular barbeque is built from cinder blocks and a sheet of expanded metal or grates holds the pig a few feet above the hot coals. It requires a bit of elbow

grease and sweat, but as someone put it before, it “builds character.”

When it comes to determining the size of the pig you choose it depends on how many people you are going to feed. We planned for roughly 30 people coming so we got a 50 pound pig (after it's been cleaned). Although, we had more guests arrive than planned for (about 45) and everyone was eager to eat so I would get a larger pig next time, about 70 pounds. I learned that at an all-day barbeque if you keep bringing out the pork, people will keep eating!

So, let's get this process started, shall we?

Building the Pit

Start this process at least one day before the roast.

You'll need:

- 30 cinderblocks
- foil
- a shovel
- a level
- a sheet of expanded metal or metal grate about 36 by 54 inches*
- Optional: about 10 heat resistant bricks

**Do not use galvanized metal. The fumes it releases will make you and everyone who eats the food sick.*

A few words on obtaining a sheet of expanded metal. After some research we found the best option (if you don't already have some lying around) is to get one custom made from shops that make oil drum barbeques. Not only is it much cheaper but you can design the grate as you want. We decided here to get it reinforced and with handles attached. Since you can reuse it, the effort to find a place that can do this is worthwhile.



Clear a patch of land about the size of the barbeque pit (about 4 feet by 6 feet). Start by forming a rectangle of cinderblocks, 2 cinder blocks wide and 3 cinder blocks long. Lay this first row on it's sides so air can run

through this bottom layer, which helps the coals to continue burning. We used heat resistant bricks to line the inside of the length of the bottom row so that there wouldn't be *too* much oxygen in the pit. However, you could seal up those holes using foil or any other barrier you can get your hands on.

Use a level tool to make sure the first row is even. If it isn't each brick thereafter will be off making your whole barbeque unstable and rickety.

Then stack the rest of the rows on top of the barbeque with the solid sides facing out. Line the bottom of the barbeque with tin foil.

Prepping the Pig

Start this process the day before the roast.

If the idea of picking out a live animal that you will later eat creeps you out, I implore you to open your mind to this process. I too was reluctant about it, fearing that my love for meat would be stifled by the stark reality of being a human who kills living things for our consumption. However, after the process (in which Val was the brave one pointing the finger) I would say it made me, Mike, Ofelia and Val more conscientious consumers and more appreciative of the meat we eat.

You'll need:

- 1 50-pound pig, gutted and cleaned
- Kosher salt
- a box cutter
- latex gloves
- Ice and cooler

Wherever you are able to source a whole hog, ask the butcher to crack the spine and head for you. This allows the pig to splay out flat over the grill. You can do this yourself but you will need a hammer, a small ax, and *very* careful hands.

When you get your pig, rinse it off very well and place it on a large clean surface. We used sheet pans on a table, and this is where latex gloves come in handy! Carefully score the surface of the pig with a box cutter in large

criss-crossing diagonals. Don't cut past the skin and layer of fat into the flesh. On a younger pig the skin will be much thinner and easier to cut through and on larger pig the skin will be thicker and tougher to penetrate.



With heaping handfuls of kosher salt, rub generous amounts all over the pig. Don't be concerned about over salting it; it is a lot of meat. We didn't measure the amount we used but I would say roughly 2 cups of kosher salt was used.

Place it in a cooler with bags of ice over it to rest overnight. We left the ice in the bag so it wouldn't melt and dilute the salt rub.

Starting the Grill

Start this early in the morning the day of the roast.

You'll need:

- 60 pounds of charcoal
 - 1 coal chimney
 - a small rake or shovel
 - BBQ tongs
 - meat thermometer *(Use one that reads the external temperature as well as the meat temperature. Having this is absolutely critical to rookie BBQing!)*
 - 6-8 sheet pans or a large sheet of metal
- *Optional: meat syringe, BBQ mop, more heat resistant bricks

Start with one 20-pound bag of charcoal spread in two even piles on both ends of the barbeque. Light this and let it burn down until the coals are ashy and glowing. For our pig, we lowered the grate so it was resting on top of the second layer of cinder blocks about 16 to 18 inches from the ground. Layer the third row of cinder blocks on top of the grate. This provides a short wall around the pig so a sheet of metal can be placed over the pig while it cooks, trapping in the heat.

It will take a while for the initial coals to burn down, so in the meantime get the pig out of the chest and patted dry. We injected ours with a *mojo* of fresh pineapple juice (which has enzymes that helps break down protein), Seville orange juice, chillies, garlic, oregano, cumin and salt. We had a bowl of this on the side that we occasionally basted the pig with.



Getting the temperature right at the beginning is really the hardest part. After you have your pig ready, it's just about maintaining that temperature. Once the coals are ready, throw your pig on the grate belly-side down and stick your thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh. Cover with a sheet of metal or in our case a carefully arranged layer of sheet pans.

Once your pig is on, reserve a few coals to start a full chimney of coals (about 5 pounds) so that they're ready to add to the pit. From here it's all about keeping an eye on the temperature. You generally want the "oven" temperature to stay around 225 to 250 degrees. After adding coals to each side, just have another chimney full of coals burning so that they're ready any time you need them. It takes babysitting, but you can play cornhole in the meantime.

To add new coals, we just removed a couple of the corner cinder blocks and used a shovel and BBQ tongs to add to the pile. As ash starts to build up just push it carefully towards the center so that you're not putting new coals over a pile of ash. Just do this gently so the ash doesn't fly up all over the pig.

After about 1 hour (when the inside had gotten some good color on it) we flipped the pig onto its back and let it roast for another 2 hours or so before flipping it back onto its stomach again. We basted it a few times with the *mojo* we injected into it, but not a lot. We really wanted the results to be pure pork– just enhanced. It cooked the rest of the way like this until the internal temperature of the meat hit about 200 degrees and was served immediately.

There was one thing I would recommend doing differently. Get some oil on that skin– we thought there was enough fat to crisp up the skin, but while some parts were, others weren't.

Eating the Pig

(I think this is pretty self-explanatory.)



Our group of friends is an adventuresome bunch so we decided to serve the pig as is, straight off the barbeque, and allow guests to pick what parts they wanted.

We made a finishing *mojo* with garlic slowly cooked in olive oil, Seville orange juice and spices to go with the pig. Rice, black beans, grilled plantains, grilled corn and a salad was a great way to finish off the meal!

Before Roasting a Pig, the Pros Advise Food Safety Homework

By **Cookson Beecher** on July 31, 2015

While summer often conjures up mouth-watering thoughts of pig roasts, if you're actually contemplating tackling this culinary feat, some homework is in order. And that includes some homework about food safety. You certainly don't want to sicken your guests, which can be avoided if you play it safe. When you roast a whole pig, your first thought may be that since you'll be cooking the heck out of it, surely you'll also be killing any bacteria such as *Salmonella* or *E. coli* that might be on the meat. But that isn't always the case since some parts of the pig will cook more quickly than others, so a simple jab of the meat thermometer in just one part of the pig isn't going to tell you the whole story.

And you certainly can't base your decision of whether the pig is cooked enough by the length of time it's been cooking and how hungry your guests are. As with any type of cooking, what you do before and after preparing the roast is also important.

a last-minute decorative flourish.) **Ways to roast a whole pig** There are all manner of methods to roast a whole pig, among them burying it in a pit, boiling it in oil, cooking it over coals in a pit above ground, and using an electric rotisserie. The first of these, which originated in Hawaii, brings up thoughts of idyllic celebrations: A wild boar is wrapped in banana leaves and buried in a pit of hot lava stones. Many people who cook whole pigs in a pit have adapted this basic practice but use other “backyard” **techniques** that involve digging a pit and burning wood in it to build up a bed of coals. This method takes a lot of time, anywhere up to 12 hours in cooking time alone, not to mention the many hours (and often beers) it takes to build up that bed of coals. **Building** a pit above ground, usually of cinder blocks, is another popular method, with the pig turned every now and then. But care needs to be taken so the coals don’t flare up and touch the meat and that the equipment you’re using isn’t made of galvanized metal, which can exude toxic fumes. This takes care and diligence on the part of the person cooking the pig. (Important note: The temperature noted in the magazine article cited in the first sentence of this paragraph is lower than the pros in this article advise.) Perhaps the most popular method is using a rotisserie, which SpitJack prefers. The Massachusetts company specializes in “cooking with fire” equipment, not only because it’s “the easiest or tastiest way” to go, but also because it represents ‘the most authentic and entertaining way’ to do it. “There is nothing like watching a whole hog turn slowly over several hours, slowly browning and transforming into a delicious meal,” states SpitJack’s website. The site also refers to roasting a whole pig as “a great American tradition” that has come to symbolize “the essence of the community cookout and the shared work and pleasure that is involved.” Of course, this is not only an American culinary favorite. Chefs and backyard cooks around the globe also like to cook whole pigs this way. But, as those who have done it already know, it is not a simple or easy task and, as the SpitJack site notes, “there is much to be considered if everyone is to enjoy the feast.” In a sometimes humorous **article** about his experience roasting a whole pig, “Do Not Go Gently into That Pig Roast,” Ryan Tate warns of how “messy and inelegant it can get.”

site notes, “there is much to be considered if everyone is to enjoy the feast.” In a sometimes humorous **article** about his experience roasting a whole pig, “Do Not Go Gently into That Pig Roast,” Ryan Tate warns of how “messy and inelegant it can get.”

He also offers this advice: “Finally, remember that no enormous cooking project will be as simple as you imagine. You see a whole pig, and you imagine the roasting, and the eating, and the joy and camaraderie that goes along with it. But don’t forget the transportation, the setup, the fuel management, stray sparks and coal and ash, grease, estimating cooking progress and correcting your schedule, and of course the cleanup.” **A generous helping of food safety** Food safety must be kept in mind from start to finish, say those who roast whole pigs professionally or sell meat-roasting equipment. A good example of why this is so important can be seen in a **recent press release** from the Washington State Department of Health about an investigation into at least 56 *Salmonella* infections that department officials say “appear to be linked to eating pork.” The same release notes that the investigation “shows a potential exposure source of several cases was whole roasted pigs, cooked and served at private events.” (Important note: The temperature noted in the state’s press release is much lower than the temperature advised by the pros interviewed in this article.) Salmonellosis, the illness caused by *Salmonella* infection, can cause severe and even bloody diarrhea, fever, chills, abdominal discomfort, and vomiting. Serious bloodstream infections may also occur. That’s definitely not anything you want at your barbecue. SpitJack’s Bruce Frankel, a former chef/restaurateur, knows only too well

how many mistakes can be made along the way, especially when people don't follow basic food-safety practices. But he said that when roasted to the right temperature and served properly, a whole pig is perfectly safe to eat. But he warns that roasting a whole pig is not like cooking a pork roast that you put in the refrigerator until it's time to cook in the oven. To begin with, a whole pig is usually roasted for a lot more people than would be at a family meal. "If you're serving a lot of people, logistics demand more care," he told **Food Safety News**. "The bigger the event, the more care needs to be taken." He said that the cook should actually be thinking like a caterer and be well-versed in the food-safety practices that caterers are required to follow. The person or group doing the cooking needs to come into the venture well-prepared. To start with, the quality of the meat needs to be good, whether it's bought from a farm or a butcher shop. It also needs to be kept cold at the site. Even the USDA stamp can't ensure that it has been kept at the right temperature. That's something that needs to be verified. In most cases, the slaughtered whole pig is picked up and taken home. Being such a large "piece of meat," means you're going to have to have something to carry it in, Frankel said. His company sells "transport bags," which he likens to "body bags." They can be closed up so bloody water doesn't drip all over the car. You'll also need some bags of ice to keep the meat cold.

Where do you put the pig when you get home? Certainly not in the refrigerator; it's far too large for that. And most coolers aren't large enough either. "A large enough cooler is not easy to find," said Frankel. First things first, though. Hose the pig off and

salt it down to help prevent bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli* from growing on the surface. You can also wipe it down with towels soaked in a strong salt solution. Frankel said a common home practice is to put the pig in a bathtub with a lot of ice. Of course, the tub should be cleaned with a bleach solution once the pig is taken out. Leaving it out on the porch with a cover over it to keep the flies off won't work since the pig not only needs to be kept clean but also cold. And you don't want a dog to come along and gnaw off part of a leg. When it's time to get the cooking apparatus ready, Frankel advises using food-grade stainless steel (304 Or 316) for the **spit**. He warned that carbon steel can impart off-flavors to the meat. In addition, galvanized metal can leach toxic zinc and should not be used as a rotisserie spit. And forget using that old rusty galvanized pipe lying around out in the yard. "You don't want to poison the meat," he said, adding, "The entire system needs to be food-safe."

Cooking the meat Temperature, of course, is critical — not just the temperature of the meat but also the temperature of the air around the meat. Frankel advised keeping the air temperature around the meat to 225-250 degrees F and cooking the meat to 195 degrees F. "There's a culinary reason for that," he explained. "When meat is cooked this way, it becomes soft and pullable — fork-tender." While some federal and state agencies recommend cooking the meat to 165 or 170 degrees F, Frankel said at that temperature you'll get some bloody meat and blood at the joints. Barbecuing a whole pig is an entirely different way to cook pork," he said. "Every part of the animal should be at least 180 degrees." He also said that at 195 degrees F, there will be no food-safety problems with the meat, at least in the cooking process. When roasting a whole pig, Frankel said you need to keep an eye on what the temperature is in various parts of the pig since different sections, such as the shoulders and legs, are much thicker than other parts, such as the ribs, which means that some parts will take longer to cook.

That's why his company offers a package of three thermometers. Two provide not only a constant reading for the leg or shoulder but also a good indication of the ambient, or cooking, temperature. The third thermometer, an instant read thermometer, provides a quick read for any part of the roast. Frankel emphasized that someone needs to watch that the temperature is OK — at least 175 degrees F. — all the way through the cooking process. When using a smoker, he recommends cooking the whole animal to beyond the safe temperature. As for cooking a whole pig in a pit, he warns that there are a lot of variables in this method. "It's an ancient practice and can be a bit dangerous," Frankel said. **Serving the meat** For food safety's sake, the meat shouldn't go below 140 degrees F for any length of time once it comes off the spit. Frankel recommends quickly cutting up the meat and putting the pieces into containers placed over chafing dishes to keep it warm. "It's nice to have hot meat to serve," he said, pointing out that not only is the meat tastier that way, but it's also safer. There's no need to let the meat "rest" before serving it because it's been cooking the entire time at a reasonable temperature. Leftovers should be cooled down and packaged with ice for people to take home. **Challenging, but satisfying** Frankel describes cooking a whole pig as "a tricky thing" and not for the faint of heart. "But when it's done right, it's very satisfying," he said. "It's a great show to see the meat turning on the spit and a great feeling to know that you've done it right." He also said that providing people with the proper information about food safety pertaining to cooking a whole pig is an important issue that needs to be

pursued. “People should know how to make sure it’s safe all the way through — until the last leftover has been eaten,” Frankel said. **Another vote for food safety**

Lance Anderson of **Marv’s Marvlus Pit BBQ Catering** also can’t stress enough the importance of food safety. “It’s our number-one priority,” he told **Food Safety News**. It’s important not to make people sick, plus a company’s reputation is based on word of mouth. “It can go two ways,” Anderson said. “Really good and customers will tell other people and you get more customers, or really bad and you can lose your business.” He said that roasting a whole pig to the proper temperature is standard practice for his business. “Our business model is to cook the fresh pork on site and serve it,” he said. Pointing out that *Salmonella* can’t live at temperatures higher than 160-165 degrees F, Anderson said that Marv’s cooks whole pigs they bring to a site to 200-205 degrees F. “We go way above and beyond,” he said, adding that if people want them to cook the pig to a lower temperature, they won’t go. “There’s just too much risk involved,” Anderson said. Marv’s also provides coolers with ice. And they won’t leave the leftovers behind unless they know the people will use the ice to keep it cold. “Most people are good about it,” he said, “although we rarely have leftovers.” Summing up some of the principles his company follows, Anderson said that using the proper equipment, making sure the cooking and serving temperatures are right, and working in a clean environment are critical. “The risks can be severe, especially for older people and children,” he said, referring to foodborne illnesses such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli*. Anderson compared the know-how required when roasting a

whole pig to services that other companies provide. “If your car needs to get fixed, you take it to a mechanic,” he said. “If you want a haircut, you go to a barber. Roasting a whole pig is similar — sometimes it’s better to leave it to the professionals.” **Some physical safety tips** When a pig is being cooked, it’s a jacket of hot fat, Frankel noted. This is why it’s so important to have a drip pan or sand for the drippings to fall into so the coals won’t flare up into flames. “It’s like a bomb when a pig catches fire,” he said. “It explodes. That’s why you need to have a fire extinguisher for grease fires handy.” In addition, since you’ll be working with very hot objects, you shouldn’t wear loose clothing that can catch on fire or shoes that are not fire-safe. Long, heavy leather gloves are also advised when handling hot objects and food-safe gloves for processing or transporting the meat. If you’re using an electric motor, make sure the power cord is away from the fire and that any extension cord used is properly rated and secured. Frankel also said that there should be nothing near the rotisserie that people can trip over and to make sure that kids are kept at a safe distance. It’s also important that the operator doesn’t drink alcohol. “If you’re managing an open fire, you should be sober,” he said.

(To sign up for a free subscription to **Food Safety News**, click [here](#).)

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Pig Roasting and Food Safety

Dec 21, 2016

By: *Bridgette Keefe, Food Safety Education Staff, Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA*

Roasting a pig is as exciting as it is delicious, but it is also a serious undertaking. If done incorrectly, people can get sick. It is critical that you safely handle and prepare the pig and choose the roasting method—grilling, rotisserie cooking, or roasting in a rock-lined pit—you are most comfortable with.

If you are unsure of the method or process for pig roasting, you may want to consider hiring a professional or breaking the animal down into individual cuts for easier cooking.

The first step before roasting the pig is food safety. That begins when the pig is picked up and ends when the last piece of pork is eaten or safely refrigerated. By following these basic food handling and food safety tips, you can reduce your risk of Salmonellosis caused by cross-contamination or eating undercooked pork.

Ordering and Transporting

After choosing the roasting method, you need to determine the number of guests you plan to serve. Allow 1½ pounds of pre-cook weight per person; this will result in approximately six ounces of cooked meat per serving. You should buy the pig from a reputable supplier and order at least seven days in advance to ensure your pig is ready for pick-up. If your supplier also sells frozen swine, ask them to thaw the pig for you under refrigerated conditions at 40 °F or less. It is not safe to roast a frozen or partially frozen pig.

Be sure to ask the supplier to wrap the pig in food grade plastic or a large good grade plastic bag to contain the juices. It is strongly recommended you pick the pig up just before you are ready to cook it. Otherwise, as soon as you get home you will need to put it in a cooler (be sure to check that you have one large enough before you order the pig) or in a food grade plastic-lined bathtub full of ice to keep it cold at 40 °F or below. Use an appliance thermometer to continuously monitor the temperature. If you do put your swine on ice, don't forget to disinfect your tub afterwards.

Preparing for the Big Event

In addition to whatever is required for your preferred roasting method, be sure to have the following items on hand: two food thermometers, a clean table for preparation and final carving, clean utensils and serving dishes, paper towels and disinfectant wipes, a clean apron, a box of disposable gloves, and most importantly, access to soap and warm water. Be sure to use clean utensils to remove and carve the roasted pig and not the dirty utensils you used during the cooking process to prevent cross contamination.

The station where you prepare and carve the pig must be clean at all times. Anything that comes into contact with the raw pig should be washed with warm water and soap immediately. Be sure to dispose of gloves after each use. It is important to prepare the pig for roasting completely separately from other food items—such as vegetables for salads and fruits that won't be cooked—to prevent cross contamination.

If you plan to stuff the pig, keep the stuffing to a minimum to reduce risk. The more you put inside the pig, the longer it will take to cook and the more difficult it will be to use your thermometer to check the internal temperature. It is important that the stuffing be cooked to at least 165 °F to destroy bacteria that may be present.

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Roasting the Pig

Take your time and follow the roasting instructions carefully. Your pig can take anywhere from 4 to 12 hours to cook depending on the size and roasting method. It could take even longer if stuffed. Check the temperature in the deepest part of each shoulder and leg, several places along the loin area, and stuffed areas. For best flavor and quality, cook the meat to at least 195 °F. It will ensure that the meat near the joints is fully cooked since there may be parts that you can't reach to measure with a thermometer. Meat should be fork-tender, and falling off the bone. Replenish wood or coals often to make sure the fire stays hot.

Feeding your Group and Packing Leftovers

Now that the pig is fully cooked, take extra care when transporting the pig from the heat source to the table using freshly cleaned utensils. You should expect to spend an hour or so on carving so be mindful of the 2-Hour Rule to refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours after cooking (or 1 hour if the weather is 90 °F or above). Serve meat on clean serving dishes as you carve. While serving, keep trays of the cooked pig on the heat to keep it warm.

Pack leftovers in shallow containers and refrigerate within 1-2 hours. It is not necessary to cool before you refrigerate it. Freeze for 4-12 months for optimal quality.

Follow these basic food safety tips and have fun roasting the pig!

For more information on cooking pork, visit [Fresh Pork from Farm to Table](#).

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The Whole Pig Roast: How to Cook a Full Sized Pig

A whole pig roast is a wondrous event, but if you've read How to Cook a Whole Pig then you know there is a lot that goes into it. A whole hog can be quite large and therefore requires special equipment and skills to pull off. While you may know the basics so far, this page will go into more of the details of things to plan for to make your whole hog roast go off without a hitch.



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Some things to consider and plan for when cooking a whole pig roast:

Invite a Lot of Friends!

This may seem obvious, but most people do not realize just how much meat is on a large hog! Don't plan a hog roast without sufficient friends and family to help you devour the tasty goodness when it is done. You'd hate to see all your hard work go to waste wouldn't you!

The Hog Rotisserie

1. A suckling pig is typically under 25 lb. Therefore, whole hogs are generally significantly larger than that. While many that you'll see roasted are 30 to 60 lb., larger adult hogs can easily weight from 100 to 200 lb. For this reason, you need a very heavy-duty and sturdy rotisserie, as seen above, to slowly and safely turn your pig roast over your fire.
2. Why do you need a rotisserie in the first place? Why not just support the pig over your fire pit on a rack? A whole pig is a large roast! If left in one position over a fire or charcoal, one side would be burnt and crispy while the other side would be raw. Just like any cut of meat, you need to turn it to be fully cooked throughout. However, turning a whole hog is not as easy as flippin' a burger! Just imagine trying to flip the hog, several times, while it is inches over hot embers. Think you could handle it? Well you're wrong, this is a set-up for disaster. Turning a large whole pig roast over a fire



by hand is next to impossible and you will end up with charred arms and eyebrows. A sturdy hog rotisserie is the only solution and in my opinion is critical to a successful pig roast.

3. Many companies make whole hog rotisseries. Whatever you use, make sure it is weight tested for more than your pig weights so you know it will hold, and turn, that weight.

Buying a Whole Pig

1. Plan ahead for your pig roast! In most areas a whole fresh hog is not that easy to come by. Find a source for a whole hog well before you plan your party.
2. Talk to your butcher. Most can special order whole pigs. Ethnic markets and butchers, Latin and Asian particularly, are a good place to start. Check out my [Where to Buy a Whole Hog for Barbecuing](#) page.
3. When buying a whole pig, find out if it will come frozen or fresh. If frozen, be sure to leave sufficient time once you get it to defrost. An average sized hog will take at least 48 hours to defrost completely. If you are planning to marinate or brine it as well, this will take additional time before the whole pig roast so plan ahead and make sure you don't run out of time!
4. Also ask your butcher how the pig will come. Most are prepped for cooking, meaning their hair and internal organs have been removed. If they haven't been prepped, make sure you have someone who can clean and prep the hog for you before cooking.

Prepping Your Whole Pig Roast: Marinating, Brining and Injecting

1. A whole pig needs to be flavored. If you just throw it on your rotisserie and cook it, the large cuts of meat will be rather bland. But do not fret, pork takes to marinating and brining like a fish to water!
2. There are many types of recipes for prepping a whole pig roast, but I particularly like brining. Brining uses a salt water solution to tenderize the meat and also to help the muscle fibers retain moisture. This helps infuse flavor and keep your roast succulent and moist. It will not dry out and become tough.
3. There are many options for brine or marinade mixtures. One brine that I particularly love and works beautifully with pork is an apple cider brine described on my [pork tenderloin barbecue recipe](#). The apple flavor and subtle sweetness really enhance and compliment the natural flavor of the meat. To add even more flavor, I like to add an abundance of herbs, onions, lemons, oranges and/or hot peppers to the brine solution.
4. A whole pig should be brined or marinated for at least 24 hours overnight, if not longer. Additionally, injecting the thickest parts of meat with the marinade or brine solution will help to be sure your brine penetrates all of the meat, not just the surface cuts.

Prepping Your Whole Pig Roast: Trussing

1. Proper trussing of your whole pig roast to the rotisserie spit is critical. As your pig cooks it will loosen, move and shift. The muscle fibers will pull apart and away from the bone. The result? Your whole hog could fall off your spit! That would be disaster. Prevent this by trussing aggressively and tightly.



2. In general, the spit should go between the thighs, along the inside of the body just under the spine and out through the mouth. Because the spit is not really going through meat, this is not secured to the spit. A large trussing need and heavy-duty kitchen twine should be used to secure the spine to the spit every 6 inches along the length of the meat. This should be tied as tightly as

possible with the knots on the back. Cut off excess twine so that it will not burn.

3. The hips, thighs and legs should also be trussed securely to hold them tight against each other and the spit. Same goes for the head and shoulders. You don't want any wiggle or give in your pig, it should move as one with the spit.
4. A great demonstration of how to truss a whole hog to a spit with pictures is available at [SpitJack](#).

Go Slow and Easy

1. A whole pig roast takes a long time, you cannot, and should not, rush it. Quickly grilled pork leads to burnt skin and dried out meat. Cook slowly over the fire pit on the rotisserie at lower temperatures (around 250 degrees or so at the surface of your roast is ideal).
2. Whole hogs can take from 4 to 24 hours to cook completely depending on their size and the cooking temperature. So plan ahead and take your time.
3. When you think the roast is nearing doneness, test the doneness with a [meat thermometer](#). All internal temperatures of the deepest meat (the hams and shoulders will be the last to cook thoroughly) should be at least 160 degrees and ideally about 165.

Basting, Basting, and Then More Basting

1. Basting with a good basting mixture helps to develop a nice thick, dark caramelized glaze on the surface of the roast. It also helps prevent the skin and superficial meat from drying out.
 2. Baste frequently throughout the cooking period, particularly when you notice the surface getting dry.
 3. Basting mixtures vary and can use any number of flavoring ingredients. Some examples of things to include are olive oil, wine, fruit juices, herbs and lemon juice. Even a little honey or sugar can enhance the flavor and help the caramelization. Just be careful not to put too much sugar on the surface of your whole pig roast or it will burn if it gets too hot. Remember, you want caramelization, not charcoal!
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