



Slow Roasted Pork Puttanesca Ragù

Ingredients

3 1/2 - 4 pounds boneless, skinless pork shoulder - See note below
Olive oil
8-10 large garlic cloves, roughly chopped
4 anchovy fillets, mashed and chopped on cutting board (or anchovy paste)
2 cans tomato paste
1/3 cup pitted Kalamata olives, rough chop if you prefer
1/4 cup drained capers
1 Tbsp red wine vinegar
1/2 tsp red pepper flakes, plus more to taste
1 tsp dried oregano
Freshly ground black pepper
1 (14.5-ounce) can whole Marzano tomatoes, crushed by hand
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice (about 1/2 lemon)
1 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley, lightly packed
Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, for serving

Side Note About Salt and Red Pepper Flakes

I am salt-sensitive in that it does not take much for me to think a dish is too salty. Other than salting the pork before its seared, I added no additional salt. Why? Because this dish includes olives, capers, and anchovies which are all salt heavy. I suggest that you taste and if needed add salt later in the cooking process or just before you serve.

The spicy heat from the red pepper flakes can vary as does your and your family's tolerance for spicy heat. The 1/2 teaspoon adds a milder background heat that most can tolerate. I initially used only 1 tsp and that was borderline too spicy for two of my guests the first time I made it. Of course, you can use up to two 2 teaspoons if you like diablo, my lips hurt, hot (subjectively speaking).

Side Note About Capers, Kalamata Olives, and Especially Anchovies

DO NOT walk away from this dish because you do not "like" any or all of these three ingredients. AND do not remove them from the recipe. They are integral to the hearty, umami flavor profile that makes this dish so incredible. They are background, blended flavors and the dish would be bland without them. Chop the olives and the capers so you do not see them staring back at you. And if you must, use anchovy paste. You will not be sorry.

Side Note about How to Cook

Who has eight hours to watch a pot cook? No one. That is why you make this in a crockpot set at low heat. I'm sure that you could cook in your oven at 200 - 250° but that is a lot of electricity, not to mention, I do not leave the house when my oven is on and eight hours is a long time.

Side Note: The Pork Shoulder

Pork Shoulder aka Boston Butt is generally sold as a 5 to 10-pound boneless roast. It's a relatively tough cut, well layered with fat, and is good for braising, slow and low roasting or barbecue. So, in this case, look for a 7-8 pound roast and you can either save half for another meal or double the recipe. I saved half.

I bought my pork at Costco where the butchers take a shoulder and trim off the skin, and fat, etc. And slice it into long pieces. They called it "boneless shoulder, country-style ribs." Clearly, it is not rib meat but this was exactly what I needed to be done, so this was perfect. Otherwise, I would ask the butcher at my grocer to prepare the shoulder and cut into 4-6 pieces that would be easy to sear. That is because I suck at properly trimming meat.

But if you are so inclined... Trim and discard the fat from the pork shoulder then cut it into 6-8 similar shaped pieces that will sear easily.

Pork Puttanesca Ragù Preparation

Lightly season the pork with salt. Bring a large skillet up to medium-high heat. Now add just enough olive oil to lightly coat the bottom of the pan. Without crowding the meat, sear it on all sides. Once seared, move it to the crockpot. Add additional pieces until all are seared and moved to the crockpot.

Once all the pork has been seared, turn the heat down to medium and add a thin layer of olive oil. Then toss in the chopped garlic and anchovies. Cook for only 2-3 minutes constantly stirring so the garlic does not burn.

Add the tomato paste to the pan. Using a flat, metal spatula, smash and smear the paste into the garlic, etc. Keep it moving while it cooks, scraping up the fried bits as they release from the pan. Continue until the color dulls and turns a brownish-red in color, approximately 3 minutes. At this point, turn off the heat and stir in the olives, capers, vinegar, red pepper flakes, oregano. The vinegar should help loosen the most stubborn of bits.

Remove from the skillet and add to the pork. Use a pair of tongs to move the pork to coat with the mixture.

Cover the crockpot and cook on low heat for 8 to 10 hours. (depending on your cooker)

It is Time to give this Pork Puttanesca Ragù "in the making" a Break

Leave completely alone for the next 5 hours. At which point you want to give it a toss. It may start to fall apart. That is fine but it is not done yet.

Continue cooking for at least 3 more hours but no more than 5 additional hours. It is not done until when you just touch it with a fork and it falls to pieces and shreds without effort. An additional sign for me was when it started to caramelize around the edges of the pot. A little caramelization is fine but too much and it could taste burnt.

Using a fork or your tongs to shred making sure there are no chunks. At this point, you can turn off the crockpot and let it rest until about 45 minutes before time to serve.

Reheat the ragù to 200 degrees.

Pour the can of tomatoes and it's juice into the slow cooker, crushing the tomatoes with your hands. Add the parsley and lemon juice. Allow just enough time to warm the tomatoes.

Serve this fabulous Puttanesca Ragù over polenta topped with Parmesan to taste.

