

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Fit to Eat

Peak of Summer Dinner

Benjamin Sims



Here on the west coast of the United States, we are blessed with bountiful year-round agriculture, and there is always a farmers' market nearby with fresh natural ingredients. Nevertheless, when the summer crops peak at this time of year I am always taken aback and overwhelmed by the sheer quantity and variety of delicious fruit and vegetables to be had and the ability of the sun to create so much sweetness and nourishment. Menus almost write themselves.

At the peak of the summer bounty, faced with the dilemma of choice, it is always a challenge to stick with my style of using few ingredients. But because everything is so fresh and available, I can just pick a few favorite items and keep the preparations simple, clean, and easy, letting their essential flavors come through.

Peak of Summer Dinner

Roasted Pork Chops
with Corn, Cherry
Tomato, & Basil Salad

Roasted Figs with Thyme

Four 4-block servings

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Roasted Pork Chops

This recipe describes brining the pork chops for at least 24 hours before cooking. If you don't have the time, you can skip the first step and simply roast them fresh (but you will notice a difference once you brine them).

- 4 pork chops (~6 oz. each with the bone in, or ~4 oz. each with no bone)
- 1 Tbsp Olive oil
- 1 quart water
- 1/2 cup salt
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 oz. white wine
- 2 bay leaves
- 6 juniper berries
- 1/2 bunch rinsed thyme sprigs

I like to brine the pork chops for at least 24 hours, to make them more tender and juicy and add to the flavor. To do so, place all the ingredients except the pork and olive oil into a pot and bring to a simmer. You don't want to over intensify the flavors so cook for only 10 or 15 minutes; then remove from the heat and let cool. This is your brine. Once the brine has cooled to room temperature, put the chops into it and refrigerate for one day. My brine recipe is on the mild side so that at the restaurant I can keep the pork in for longer if I need to without it getting too salty or sweet.

Remove the pork chops from the refrigerator and let them come up to room temperature. Remove the chops from the brine, dry it off with a towel, and let it sit out for 20 minutes on a towel. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.

When you are almost ready to eat (the meat takes about 10 to 15 minutes to cook), heat a large ovenproof sauté pan over medium high heat. (The pan needs to be big enough to accommodate all the chops; if it's not, heat two pans.) When the pan is hot, add the olive oil and swirl so that it coats the bottom, and then carefully lay the chops in the pan to brown, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Once they are in the pan, the less you touch them, the better. You can tell from their edges how they are browning.

When they turn golden, flip them and brown the other side. Once both sides are lightly browned, pour off most



of the excess fat from the pan and put in the oven. Bake for 3 minutes on each side.

Corn, Cherry Tomato, and Basil Salad

- 6 ears of corn
- 2 baskets of cherry tomatoes
- Small handful of fresh basil
- 2 Tbsp good olive oil
- 2 tsp red wine vinegar
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Boil 1 quart of salted water. Remove the husks and wipe the silky threads from the corn. Carefully cut off the kernels of corn with a sharp knife. (I like to lay the cob flat on a towel and slice across it. The towel collects the stray bits.) Add the kernels to the boiling water and boil for 2 minutes. Drain, rinse in cool water, and leave in a colander to drip dry.

Rinse and halve the cherry tomatoes. (I start the slice at the little hole where the stem was, as this gives the knife something to grip.) Cut the basil into thin strips, or chiffonade by stacking a few leaves, rolling them lengthwise, and then slicing the roll as thinly as you can.

In a large bowl mix together the corn, tomatoes, basil, oil, and vinegar and season with salt and pepper to taste. Chill until you are ready to serve the salad with the pork chops.

Roasted Figs with Thyme
(Dessert)

- 6 beautiful ripe figs
- 12 sprigs of thyme, rinsed
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper

Rinse the figs and cut in half through the stem; place the figs cut side up in a pan with shallow sides. Drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and place a sprig of thyme on each half.

Roast in a 450° oven for about 10 minutes. If you put them in the oven when you start cooking the pork, everything will be hot at the same time.

You can serve the roasted figs on the same plate as the pork and salad or serve them in a separate dish. They are good enough to eat by themselves before or after the pork, but you should also try them together; it's a wonderful combination.



Benjamin Sims is currently chef at Ristorante Avanti in Santa Cruz, CA. He graduated from the California Culinary Academy in 1996 and has trained and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area, Italy, and London. Benjamin has been a regular at CrossFit Santa Cruz for the past two years, in which time his pull-ups have increased from zero to twenty-five. (Yes, he kips.)