

# Pork Belly Simmered in Coconut Juice and Caramel

*Thịt Kho Nước Dừa*

A glorious dish in the “kho” style, simmered with caramel, this dish gets added complexity from coconut juice, the liquid trapped in the center of young coconuts (not to be confused with coconut milk).

My friend Chris Rimlinger, a medical doctor by day, is an accomplished Vietnamese cook who taught me how to make this dish. This light version of kho has a very thin broth. If you like it more condensed, reduce the water by one cup. The intense sauce is pure comfort food when eaten over steamed jasmine rice. The pickled mustard greens’ sour flavor echoes the way that the Malaysian chefs pair their brilliant yellow vegetable pickle, “acar awak,” (pg. 324) with the deep brown savory chicken and mushroom stew, Pong Teh (pg. 322).

*Makes 4 to 6 bowls as a one-dish meal*

- 2 lb. (2 kg.) Pork belly, skin-on, 1 1/2-inch (3.8 cm.) pieces (substitute pork shanks or shoulder (butt))
- 20 fl oz. Young coconut juice with meat, from fresh coconut, or buy frozen or canned (pg. 60)
- 3 cup (750 ml.) Water
- 2 medium Shallots, thinly sliced, about 1/4 inch (0.6 cm.) thick
- 3 cloves Garlic, smashed
- 6 Tbsp. Fish sauce (*nước mắm*)
- 1 tsp. Coarsely ground black pepper
- 4 pieces Star anise
- 1/4 cup Vietnamese caramel sauce (pg. 248)
- 4 lg. Hardboiled eggs
- 2-inch (5 cm.) piece Rock sugar, about 2oz. (56 gm.)
- 4 Scallions, chopped
- 4 oz. Pickled mustard greens (*Dưa Cải Chua*), cut into bite size pieces (pg. 81)

**1.** Blanch the Pork: Cover pork with cold water, bring to a boil, drain and discard all liquid. Rinse pork briefly to wash off impurities.

**2.** Cook the Pork: In a saucepan, cover pork with coconut juice, 3 cups water, shallots, garlic, fish sauce, black pepper, star anise, and caramel sauce. Bring this mixture to a boil, lower to a simmer, and cook until pork is almost tender, about 1 to 1 1/2 hrs.

**3.** Add hard boiled eggs; cover pot and simmer 20 minutes. Add rock sugar and stir to dissolve. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt, fish sauce, and sugar. Adjust color with additional caramel sauce—it should be a deep brown color.

**4.** Garnish with scallions, and serve bowl of mustard greens and steamed white rice. (pg. 106)



*The lively throngs of the small waterways of the Mekong Delta are passageways for young coconut commerce.*



## How and Why

1. Blanch pork in water for clearer sauce and milder flavor. Excess blood is extracted from the pork during blanching.
2. Add the rock sugar at the end of simmering to avoid toughening the pork. Excessive sugar will toughen meats; the sugar pulls moisture from it.