

From the Kitchen at San Damiano Friary in San Francisco

In our urban friaries we are blessed to have the opportunity to become active members of parishes. It is a joy to get to know lots of different folks outside our immediate circle of supporters and friends, and it's particularly fun when you run into them out and about in the community during the week.

A couple of times when I have been shopping at the Lucky Supermarket over in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood I have run into Annie, a fellow member of All Saints' Episcopal Church here in San Francisco. So now grocery shopping is a strong association for the two of us. One Sunday at the Peace, Annie grabbed me and whispered, "Lucky is having a Buy One, Get One sale on meat." I mumbled a quick "Thank you. And also with you..." And the next day I was out at Lucky with one of the brothers stocking up.

We don't normally have meat on hand unless someone has donated it to us or one of the brothers found a really great sale on it. If we get pork chops one of the things I love to do is serve them smothered, which really just means they have been braised in gravy. It's not so much a recipe as a technique: sauté the meat, make a gravy with the pan drippings, return the meat to the pan, cover it and let it simmer gently until tender and cooked through. But I also like to shake it up. Sometimes I bread the chops first which makes for a thicker gravy in the end. Sometimes I vary the gravy by using wine, or changing up the kind of stock, or making a milk gravy. If I have to make the dish in advance, or I have to make a large amount for a crowd at our weekly Open House, I combine the meat and gravy in a covered casserole and bake it until tender.

This is a perfect Fall or Winter dish that goes great served with mashed sweet potatoes and pan-seared broccoli or Brussels sprouts. For the basic recipe to serve eight (which is the size of our household right now), here's what you'll need:

Smothered Pork Chops

8 pork chops (bone-on is best, but I have also done this with boneless chops)
Vegetable oil
3 teaspoons of salt, divided
2 teaspoons of ground black pepper, divided
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of all-purpose flour, divided
1 medium onion, sliced thinly
1 clove of garlic, minced
2 cups of chicken stock or broth
2 cups of milk (whole, fat-free, or any other variant is fine)
1- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons of dried thyme leaves
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of ground nutmeg
2 teaspoons of Worcestershire sauce

Preheat your oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit, and get a cast iron skillet over a medium-high heat with enough oil to coat the pan.

Season the chops with a teaspoon each of the salt and pepper, rubbing the seasoning in. Spread half a cup of the flour onto a plate and then dredge each of the chops in the flour, shaking off the excess before getting them into the hot pan. Brown the chops for about 2 to 3 minutes on each side, and reserve them while you make the gravy. (You might need to do this browning process in batches so you don't over crowd your pan.)

Once the chops are all browned, check to see that you have about 4 tablespoons of fat in the pan, adding more as needed. Saute the onions in the pan until they are lightly browned, which should take about 5 to 8 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 30 seconds. Then add the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of flour and stir this around for about a minute. Switch to a whisk, turn the heat up to high, and slowly add in the stock, whisking constantly to make sure you are not getting lumps. When you are satisfied that you are lump-free, whisk in the milk. Season this with the remaining 2 teaspoons of salt and 1 teaspoon of pepper, and then whisk in also the thyme, nutmeg, and Worcestershire sauce. Bring the gravy up to a boil and then reduce the heat to medium-low and allow it to simmer for about 5 minutes to thicken. Taste and adjust the seasoning as you desire.

Pour half of the gravy into the bottom of a casserole dish, covering the base evenly. Lay the chops on top of the gravy. (It's okay if the chops overlap a little.) Pour the remaining gravy evenly on top of the chops. Cover the dish fairly tightly with foil and bake in the preheated oven for 25 to 30 minutes. Remove the dish from the oven and let it rest, covered, for about 5 minutes before you serve the chops.

~Br. Simon