

pork loin chops

with ricotta gnocchi in sage butter

serves 4

These tender pork loin chops are topped with a rich, tangy sauce that gets its verve from Meyer lemons, which are milder than conventional lemons. Meyers are believed to be derived from a cross between a lemon and an orange. They are not as available year-round as traditional lemons, which are equally suitable for this dish. And if you don't have a stash of homemade veal stock handy, buy a small container of commercial demi-glace, which can be easily transformed into the rich stock used to make the sauce.

However, the star of this show just might be the ricotta gnocchi. Typically, gnocchi are made with potatoes. This version, made with ricotta cheese and flour, is lighter and fluffier than its potato-based cousin. Creamy-smooth on the inside and coated with a fresh sage-infused butter sauce, these gnocchi are so good, you could confidently feature them as a main course on their own.

This is the kind of dish that marries well with many kinds of wines, both red and white. Rich, barrelfermented Chardonnay, or fruity Riesling, Gewürztraminer, and Viognier would all complement the meat and the buttery gnocchi. Lighter, fruity reds with good acidity, such as Pinot Noir or Zinfandel, would also play well here.

For the gnocchi:

1 lb/455 g whole-milk ricotta cheese
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
¼ cup/30 g freshly grated Romano cheese
2 cups/260 g all-purpose/plain flour, plus more for dusting
1 tsp salt
1 cup/240 ml Veal Stock (page 217 or made from a store-bought demi-glace)
2 tbsp fresh Meyer lemon juice
1 tbsp sugar
Salt
Freshly ground pepper
4 pork loin chops, 6 to 8 oz/170 to 225 g each
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup/115 g unsalted butter, cut into
6 large pieces
¼ cup/7 g chopped fresh sage

To make the gnocchi: In a large bowl, combine the ricotta, eggs, Romano, 1 cup/130 g of the flour, and the salt. Using a wooden spoon, stir vigorously to blend well. The mixture should be light and fluffy. Refrigerate the ricotta mixture for at least 30 minutes and up to 1 hour to allow it to firm up.

While the ricotta mixture is resting, in a small saucepan over medium-high heat, combine the stock, lemon juice, and sugar and stir to mix well. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has reduced and thickened into a rich sauce, about 5 minutes.

Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt. Remove the lemon sauce from the heat and set aside.

Pour the remaining 1 cup/130 g flour onto a clean work surface. Using a large spoon, scoop out four equal portions of the ricotta mixture onto the floured surface. Dust your hands with flour, take up one scoop of the ricotta mixture, and roll in the flour, kneading lightly until you incorporate enough flour to form a soft dough. Dust your hands and the work surface with more flour as needed to prevent sticking. Repeat with the remaining portions of ricotta mixture. Using only your hands, shape each dough piece into a rope ½ to ¾ in/12 mm to 2 cm in diameter and about 12 in/30.5 cm long.

Cut each rope crosswise into nuggets (or little pillows) about 1 in/2.5 cm long. Gently roll each piece lightly in more flour to shape and prevent sticking. You will produce about 50 gnocchi.

Bring a large pot three-fourths full of lightly salted water to a boil. Have ready a large bowl of ice water and a baking sheet/tray lined with parchment/baking paper.

Using a slotted spoon, carefully place 15 to 20 gnocchi in the boiling water. When the gnocchi float to the surface, 1 to 2 minutes, use the slotted spoon to transfer them to the ice bath. (The cooling firms them up and makes them easier to sauté in the final step.) When the gnocchi are cool, using the slotted spoon, transfer them to the paper. Repeat to cook the remaining gnocchi. Set aside.

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and preheat to 450°F/230°C/gas 8.

Lightly salt and pepper the pork chops on both sides. In a Dutch oven or large, ovenproof frying pan, heat the olive oil over high heat. When the oil starts to shimmer, place the chops in the pan and sear until golden brown, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer the pot to the lower rack of the oven and bake until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a chop registers 150°F/65°C, 8 to 10 minutes.

Immediately after placing the meat in the oven, in a large sauté pan or frying pan over medium high heat, melt the butter. (The pan should be large enough to fit all the gnocchi in a single layer. If you don't have a pan large enough, divide the butter, gnocchi, and sage between two pans.)

When the butter has melted, reduce the heat to medium and gently stir in the sage with a wooden spoon. Add the gnocchi and sauté until browned on the first side, 2 to 3 minutes. Using a spatula or slotted spoon, carefully turn the gnocchi and sauté until browned on the second side, about 2 minutes longer. Remove from the heat.

When the gnocchi are almost done, the loin chops will also be done or almost done. Reheat the lemon sauce over medium-low heat. As soon as the chops are done, remove from the oven and let rest in the pan for 2 to 3 minutes.

Place a loin chop on each plate and garnish each with 1 to 2 tbsp lemon sauce. Arrange 10 to 12 sage butter-drenched gnocchi beside each chop. Serve at once.