

The background of the cover is a photograph of a rustic outdoor dining area. A long table covered with a white and yellow checkered tablecloth is set with various items including a large orange pitcher, glasses, plates, a basket of dark grapes, and small teal pots with pink and purple flowers. Two black metal chairs with wooden slats are in the foreground. The table is positioned against a rough stone wall. A black lantern hangs from above, and a window in the wall shows more lanterns inside. A tree trunk is on the left side of the frame.

ELIZABETH MINCHILLI

THE ITALIAN TABLE

Creating
festive meals
for family and
friends

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK



Porchetta

In the introduction I sang the praises of porchetta done the traditional way. Making it that way at home is usually not an option since a) not many people host the crowds necessary to devour an entire pig and b) even if you did, you probably don't have an oven big enough.

The following recipe is my home version. A true porchetta contains the loin as well as the belly (pictured page 84, right), but this recipe is pure belly. This not only ensures a tender, tasty outcome, but it also means that the entire roast will be cooked through, without any part drying out.

When ordering the pork belly, make sure to tell your butcher you would like yours with the rind on, please. And if you can get him to score the rind in a diamond pattern, all the better. If not, you can try to do so yourself, though it's not easy. If that doesn't work, jab yours with the point of your knife to make some holes. However you accomplish this part, it is essential, since it allows the fat to leak out during cooking, turning it into crisp crackling. The pork belly needs to marinate for a day before cooking and then it takes about seven hours to complete the process, so be sure to leave yourself plenty of time. In most parts of Italy porchetta is served cool or at room temperature. So if you can let it cool off completely, or cool it and serve it the next day, even better. **SERVES 8 TO 10**

**7 pounds of pork belly, in 1 piece,
with rind attached**

1 cup of fresh sage leaves

1 cup of rosemary leaves

6 cloves of garlic, peeled

1 tablespoon of fennel seeds

**Grated zest from 1 organic, unsprayed
lemon (if using a conventional lemon,
scrub it well and dry it)**

1 tablespoon of sea salt

**1 teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper,
plus more to taste**

5 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil

Wash and pat dry the pork belly. Lay it on a flat surface, with the rind up. If the butcher has not scored the rind, try to do so yourself or use a very sharp knife to poke a lot of holes in the rind.

Put the sage, rosemary, garlic, fennel seeds, lemon zest, salt, pepper, and olive oil in a food processor and process until finely chopped.

Flip the pork belly over so the inside is up. Rub about half of the paste over the meat. Roll the roast up as tightly as you can, from the long end. Using a long piece of twine, secure it evenly along the entire length of the roast, looping it around every few inches. If you've never done

this before, you may need someone else to help hold it together while you're tying it.

Rub the rest of the seasoning all over the outside and both ends, and push some into the slits on the skin, too.

Place the roast in a glass baking dish and cover it tightly with plastic wrap. Let sit in the refrigerator for 24 hours.

Take the roast out of the refrigerator 2 hours before you plan to cook it.

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Put the porchetta on a V-shaped rack in a roasting pan and put it in the oven. Let it roast, undisturbed, for 3½ hours. There is no need to baste it, since the fat coming out of the meat will do the basting on its own. The roast should be done at the end of the 3½ hours, but you can check by inserting a thermometer, which should read 180°F.

Remove the porchetta from the oven and let cool for at least 2 hours before cutting and serving it either cool or at room temperature. If serving the next day, place in the refrigerator, but make sure you remove it 2 hours ahead of time and let it come to room temperature.

To cut the porchetta, use a slightly serrated knife, which will help you slice through the rind. An electric knife works quite well; a bread knife also does the trick. Cut the porchetta into ½-inch slices and lay them out on a platter to serve.

