

# Canadian Living

INSPIRING IDEAS FOR EVERYDAY



## Iberico pork: The new pig on the block

From the humble acorn grows the mighty Iberico. Pata Negra is the newest pork delicacy to hit Canada, and it's good for you too!

By Signe Langford

Watch your [back-bacon](#) Berkshire, there's a new pig on the block -- the Pata Negra ("black-footed pig") - and he's ready to take his rightful place at the top of the porcine food chain. Delivering flavour and texture like no other -- delicate, nutty, with melt-in-your-mouth marbling -- Black Iberian Pig, more commonly known by its Serrano name of Pata Negra, is the newest contender with the most serious pedigree.

### **Pata Negra: Not your pink piggy**

Looking dramatically different from the white domestic pig we've become accustomed to in Canada -- black hair, tall, almost elegant legs, big floppy ears -- Pata Negra from South-Western Spain is the last of its kind. An indigenous, free-roaming living link to the European wild [boar](#), Pata Negra forages the forest floors of the region's dehesas, or Mediterranean oak woodlands, feasting on wild thyme, rosemary, mushrooms, and most significantly, acorns. It's this ancient and completely natural diet and Pata Negra's own genetic ability to store fat inside of, not just around muscle tissue, that produces its uniquely tender, rich, rosy meat -- almost beef-y -- with a high degree of marbling.

### **Pork that's good for your heart**

But lest all this talk of fat and marbling put you off your jamon. Take comfort in the fact that this little piggy is good for us. Pata Negra fat is comprised of more than 50% the healthy kind -- unsaturated fats like olive oils -- and it's believed that eating Pata Negra can actually reduce one's levels of [bad cholesterol](#) and increase levels of the good stuff. Doctors in Spain refer to Pata

Negra as "walking olive trees", and consider it a health food! What's next? Ice cream that flattens our tummies?

### **Costs of Iberico pork**

Thankfully, we don't need a prescription to enjoy this delicacy which made its Canadian debut in April at Pangaea Restaurant in Toronto's ritzy Yorkville neighbourhood. A fortunate few celebrity chefs, food writers, and foodies in the know were treated to the inspired creations of Toronto Chefs Martin Koupric and Chris McDonald showcasing the prepared Pata Negra, called Jamon Iberico, and its Lomo, or loin. And though we don't need our doctor's say-so to enjoy this spectacular indulgence, we do need rather deep pockets. If you thought a Berkshire loin was pricey at \$15 to \$20 per kilo, prepare to suffer a case of butcher shop shock. Iberico pork runs between \$100 to \$300 per kilo depending on the cut.

### **The sweetest plum: Iberico de Bellota ham**

The most coveted cut is the Iberico de Bellota ham: the cured leg of a pig that was born in the spring and spent the last few months of its idyllic life gorging on fallen acorns through the winter. The resulting meat is remarkably hazel-nutty, with an astonishing red hue and a silken texture that simply dissipates on the tongue with barely a chew. These are the gams that have chefs and foodies from Tokyo to Manhattan salivating, and otherwise sensible Canadians willing to shell-out up to \$1600. And with the arrival of the first air shipment of Iberico ham and fresh cuts bearing names that take a bit of learning and much rolling of r's: lomo, presa, lagarto, and secreto, expect to see the word Berkshire nudged off menus, and replaced with Iberico at some of Canada's chi-chi-est restos.

### **Importing Iberico pork to Canada**

Mike Tkaczuk, President of Serrano Imports, spent the last five years jumping through governmental hoops and wooing traditional Spanish producers in a quest to oblige chefs and food lovers who hunger for the finest and most cutting-edge ingredients. "We are incredibly excited to be the first importers in Canada to offer this remarkable product," he explains, with a broad smile and sigh of relief, "Canadian consumers will be truly amazed when they taste it. It is rich and smooth, with a robust and slightly sweet nutty taste. You simply cannot compare it to any other cured ham in the world." Working with Fermin's Iberico, of Al Alberca, Salamanca province, who have been raising, slaughtering and processing the Pata Negra since 1959, Tkaczuk expects to fill orders for the finest restaurants and culinary boutiques in Quebec, Ontario, and B.C. by this fall. For most of us, savouring a tissue-thin slice of Iberico ham or thick, juicy chop will be a once-in-a-life time treat, and as luck would have it, we'll be able to, just in time for holiday splurging.