

Ham hock

Ham hock – the bit between a pig’s front trotter and shoulder - or “hand” as butchers would call it. A cured hock is known as a knuckle of bacon – great for boiling with lentils, dried peas and other pulses.

I am going to use a knuckle of bacon for this week’s recipe to prepare 2 dishes with – boiled ham hock with parsley sauce, also yellow split peas and bacon soup.

The ham hock will yield 2 main course portions when served with accompanying vegetables, grain mustard mash, parsley carrots and buttered cabbage marry well, parsley sauce essential. However the stock from simmering the bacon will be sufficient for 8 portions of soup. So! In these credit crunch times, 10 portions from a £4 joint – not bad at 40p a portion.

Slow braised ham hock, parsley sauce – serves 2

Ham hock

1 450g ham hock
1 large carrot, roughly chopped
1 large leek, roughly chopped
1 large Spanish onion, roughly chopped
4 sticks of celery, roughly chopped
1 bay leaf
12 black peppercorns
Plenty of cold water

Parsley sauce

25g butter
3 level tbsp plain flour
200ml milk
White pepper
Handful chopped flat leaf parsley
Optional: 1 egg yolk
30ml single cream
Grated rind of a lemon

Cooking a ham hock (& making delicious stock)

Often ham hocks will be sold vac - packed in vacuum-sealed packets. Open the packet and soak the joint for 12 hours in cold water, refresh or change the water a couple of times during this period.

Put the joint in a large pan of cold water, skin side down. Add a roughly chopped carrot, roughly chopped leek, roughly chopped onion, 4 roughly chopped sticks of celery, a bay leaf and a few black peppercorns.

Slowly bring the pan to simmer, skim off any scum that floats to the surface. Simmer the joint for 1½ hours, or until the meat is completely and utterly tender.

Remove the joint from the cooking liquor. The rind should peel away easily (if it doesn't, return to the pan for further cooking). Remove the rind and any excess fat that you don't fancy eating.

Flake the meat from the bone and serve with parsley sauce.

Reserve the stock to prepare the soup with.

Parsley sauce

Melt the butter in a small saucepan, add the flour and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Season with white pepper. Salt is unnecessary because the ham hock is so salty. Stir in the parsley./

For a cheffy twist, whisk an egg yolk into 30ml single cream; stir in over a low heat, which adds an extra gloss and thickness to the sauce.

If you want to go completely over the top, add the finely grated zest of a lemon.