

Horseradish-Crusted Beef Tenderloin

We wanted to jazz up bland tenderloin with a crisp, pungently flavored horseradish crust. What would it take to make our plan stick?

≧ BY BRYAN ROOF ≦

Cooks go to all kinds of crazy lengths to beef up the taste of bland, buttery-smooth tenderloin. The most famous example is beef Wellington, in which the meat is coated in foie gras and minced mushrooms, then encrusted in pastry. More recent innovations try everything from encasing the beef in a double-truffle crust (bread crumbs, sliced truffles, and truffle oil) to saucing it with concoctions that include specialty vinegar, black cherries, and bittersweet chocolate. By comparison, simply serving tenderloin with pungent horseradish sauce, a fine but standard accompaniment, seems a little uninspired for the special dinners at which this pricey cut is typically served. But if I could combine the bracing flavor of horseradish with a crisp, golden crust that would also add textural contrast to rosy, medium-rare meat—now, that would be a different story.

When I did some research, I discovered that I wasn't the only one to have this idea. But the recipes I found were disastrous. Most did nothing more than add the horseradish to a basic bread-crumbs mixture before spreading it over the beef and roasting it in the oven. The crust absorbed the meat's juices, causing most of it to turn mushy and fall off, while what "shell" still remained had only a trace of horseradish flavor.



To intensify beefy flavor, we seared the tenderloin in a hot pan before applying the coating.

grated, I needed to use a full quarter cup to get the flavor I wanted. But even after pressing it, this amount of wet horseradish was still dampening the crust.

Perhaps I needed to reevaluate my choice of breading. Crackers and Melba toast were OK but added too much of their own flavor. On a whim, I tried crushed potato chips. These were mostly a hit, keeping their crunch and contributing a salty potato flavor that tasters loved. The only problem was their slightly processed taste. With a cut this expensive, I wanted only the best—so why not whip up my own potato crumbles? I shredded a small potato on a box grater, rinsed the shreds to remove surface starch, and then cooked them in oil until browned and crisp. A test run proved that combining them with the panko (which I pretoasted) was the best option: The panko coated the nooks in the meat that the potatoes couldn't reach, while the potato shreds juttied out, making for a craggy, golden crust full of savory flavor.

Still, my results weren't ideal. In order to keep the crust truly crisp, the most horseradish I could add to the crumb mixture was 2 tablespoons. I'd have to find another

way of upping horseradish flavor.


Meat and Potato

My starting point was choosing the right cut of meat and the key ingredients for my crust. A center-cut roast—also known as Châteaubriand—was a must, because its uniform shape cooks evenly. For the crust, I figured I'd work with Japanese panko crumbs (for their ultra-crisp texture) and try a common breading technique: lightly flouring the meat, applying a thin wash of egg white, and then rolling the roast in crumbs flavored with horseradish, minced shallot, garlic, and herbs.

As for the horseradish, it seemed likely that the fresh stuff would have more pungency than the bottled variety, so I grated a couple of tablespoons of the gnarly-looking root and added it to my panko mix before breading and roasting the tenderloin. To my disappointment, the fresh horseradish turned unpleasantly bitter when cooked, and the crumb coating failed to crisp. Bottled prepared horseradish, made with grated horseradish and vinegar, proved a better choice. A good brand (see "Horseradish" at left) boasts a bright—not bitter—bite, even after exposure to heat. Pressing the horseradish in a strainer removed the excess moisture, but since weight for weight prepared horseradish is less potent than freshly

Hold Your Horseradish!

If I couldn't add more horseradish to the crust, why not just add some to the egg wash? Unfortunately, the wash (which was just egg white, for minimal egg flavor) was too thin to hold the horseradish, which dripped down the meat. Perhaps the answer was adding mayonnaise to create a paste, another approach we've used successfully to make breading stick. This worked well; by combining 1 beaten egg white, 1½ teaspoons mayonnaise, and 2 tablespoons horseradish, I was able to make a pungently flavored paste that clung firmly to the tenderloin. Adding a bit of mustard to this mix enhanced the spiciness of the horseradish. Everything seemed to be going well until I roasted the tenderloin and tried to slice it, at which point the beef came out of its shell—literally. The crust cracked into pieces that fell straight onto the cutting board.

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HOW TO MAKE

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TASTING Horseradish

"Prepared horseradish" can taste strikingly different depending on where in the store you buy it. Shelf-stable products are full of additives and had such weak flavor that we eliminated them from consideration, sticking with four brands from the refrigerator aisle. Tasters gave high marks to brands with fine, versus coarse, texture and sinus-clearing heat. For complete testing results, go to www.cooksillustrated.com/dec09. —Peggy Chung Collier

HOT TO TROT

BOAR'S HEAD All-Natural Horseradish

Price: \$2.49 for 9 ounces

Comments: The kick of this winner reminded tasters of "straight wasabi."



MILD MANNERED

GOLD'S Prepared Horseradish

Price: \$2.99 for 6 ounces

Comments: A "sweet, relish-y" taste put this horseradish in third place.



Stumped, I consulted our science editor. He came up with a novel idea: Replace the egg white with gelatin (see “Stick-to-It Solution,” below). I added just ½ teaspoon to the horseradish mixture, applied it to the tenderloin, and roasted the meat. Unlike the crackly egg-based paste, the gelatin mixture bound the bread crumbs firmly to the meat yet yielded slightly as I cut it. At long last, each slice delivered rosy beef topped by a cohesive horseradish crust.

Only one problem remained: Given time, the crust still became slightly soggy from meat juices released during cooking. Three final tweaks fixed this problem. First, I adjusted the oven temperature to 400 degrees (up until now, I’d been using a more moderate 300), which helped keep the crust a little crisper. Second, I seared the meat in a hot skillet, then let it rest on a wire rack set in a baking sheet so that its juices could drain off before applying the paste and the crumbs. Finally, I coated only the top and sides of the tenderloin, leaving an “opening” on the bottom for meat juices to escape as it roasted.

Served with a horseradish cream sauce, this beef tenderloin was a standout, combining succulent meat with a crisp, salty, pungent crust. Who needs beef Wellington?

HORSERADISH-CRUSTED BEEF TENDERLOIN

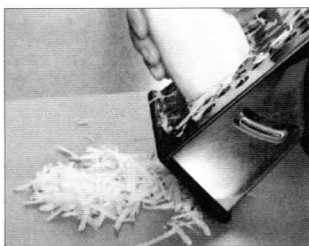
SERVES 6

NOTE: If using table salt, reduce the amount in step 1 to 1½ teaspoons. Add the gelatin to the horseradish paste at the last moment, or the mixture will become unspreadable. If desired, serve the roast with Horseradish Cream Sauce (recipe follows; you will need 2 jars of prepared horseradish for both the roast and sauce). If you choose to salt the tenderloin in advance, remove it from the refrigerator 1 hour before cooking. To make this recipe 1 day in advance, prepare it through step 3, but in step 2 do not toss the bread crumbs with the other ingredients until you are ready to sear the meat.

- 1 beef tenderloin center-cut Châteaubriand (about 2 pounds), trimmed of fat and silver skin
- Kosher salt (see note)
- 3 tablespoons panko bread crumbs
- 1 cup plus 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1¼ teaspoons ground black pepper
- 1 small shallot, minced (about 1½ tablespoons)
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- ¼ cup well-drained prepared horseradish (see note)
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves
- ½ teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves
- 1 small russet potato (about 6 ounces), peeled and grated on large holes of box grater
- 1½ teaspoons mayonnaise
- 1½ teaspoons Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon powdered gelatin (see note)

TECHNIQUE | THREE STEPS TO A CRISPER COATING

Fried potato shreds made for a far crisper—and more flavorful—crust than the typical bread-crumbs coating.



1. **GRATE** potato on large holes of box grater for thin slivers that will crisp up quickly.



2. **RINSE** shreds to remove surface starch, then squeeze dry in kitchen towel.



3. **FRY** potatoes in oil to create savory crumbles that keep their crunch.

1. Sprinkle roast with 1 tablespoon salt, cover with plastic wrap, and let stand at room temperature 1 hour or refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees.

2. Toss bread crumbs with 2 teaspoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in 10-inch nonstick skillet. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until deep golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to rimmed baking sheet and cool to room temperature (wipe out skillet). Once cool, toss bread crumbs with shallot, garlic, 2 tablespoons horseradish, parsley, and thyme.

3. Rinse grated potato under cold water, then squeeze dry in kitchen towel. Transfer potatoes and remaining cup oil to 10-inch nonstick skillet. Cook over high heat, stirring frequently, until potatoes are golden brown and crisp, 6 to 8 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer potatoes to paper towel-lined plate and season lightly with salt; let cool for 5 minutes. Reserve 1 tablespoon oil from skillet and discard remainder. Once potatoes are cool, transfer to quart-sized zipper-lock bag and crush until coarsely ground. Transfer potatoes to baking sheet with bread-crumbs mixture and toss to combine.

4. Pat exterior of tenderloin dry with paper towels and sprinkle evenly with remaining teaspoon pepper. Heat reserved tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Sear tenderloin until well browned on all sides, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer to wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet and let rest 10 minutes.

5. Combine remaining 2 tablespoons horseradish, mayonnaise, and mustard in small bowl. Just before coating tenderloin, add gelatin and stir to combine. Spread horseradish paste on top and sides of meat, leaving bottom and ends bare. Roll coated sides of tenderloin in bread-crumbs mixture, pressing gently so crumbs adhere in even layer that just covers horseradish paste; pat off any excess.

6. Return tenderloin to wire rack. Roast until instant-read thermometer inserted into center of roast registers 120 to 125 degrees for medium-rare, 25 to 30 minutes.

7. Transfer roast to carving board and let rest 20 minutes. Carefully cut meat crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices and serve.

HORSERADISH CREAM SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

- ½ cup heavy cream
- ½ cup prepared horseradish
- 1 teaspoon table salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper

Whisk cream in medium bowl until thickened but not yet holding soft peaks, 1 to 2 minutes. Gently fold in horseradish, salt, and pepper. Transfer to serving bowl and refrigerate at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour before serving.

SCIENCE EXPERIMENT

Stick-to-It Solution

A simple egg wash is the usual choice for binding a bread-crumbs coating to meat, but it didn’t work for our slippery horseradish–bread-crumbs mixture. Could we do better by replacing the egg white with gelatin?

THE EXPERIMENT

We prepared two pastes, one made with egg white, horseradish, mayonnaise, and mustard and a second where we substituted ½ teaspoon of gelatin for the egg white. We applied each paste to a beef tenderloin and then cooked the roasts according to our recipe.

THE RESULTS

The gelatin paste kept the bread crumbs attached to the meat much better than the egg version. It also had a slight elasticity that allowed it to remain firmly stuck to the meat as we sliced it.

THE EXPLANATION

Meat and gelatin have a natural affinity. Both are made up of linear proteins that are able to form tight bonds with each other. The proteins in egg whites, on the other hand, are globular (wound up like balls of yarn). Although egg whites do eventually stretch into more linear shapes when heated, they still form a weaker bond with meat than gelatin. —B.R.