

## **Tongue**

**By Jennifer McLagan from *Odd Bits: How to Cook the Rest of the Animal***

### ***How to Choose:***

The world of tongues is vast. Duck tongues, popular in Asian cuisines, are tiny and have a small bone that makes them fiddly. In this section, I limit myself to beef, veal, lamb, and pork tongues; if you have access to game animals, don't hesitate to use their tongues in these recipes. The bigger the tongue, the coarser its texture, so I prefer tongues around 3 1/3 pounds / 1.5 kg or less, as their texture is finer. While veal tongues are the most prized, beef, lamb, and pork tongues are all worth eating. Tongues can be bought fresh, frozen, brined, and sometimes smoked. Often your only choice will be a frozen one, especially with beef or veal tongue. The color of a tongue can vary from pink with a gray cast to almost all gray. Sometimes the skin of the tongue is quite mottled, often with odd dark spots. The color and the dark patches are no indication of quality; they are just a result of the animal's breed. Tongues have a thick, bumpy skin, and often there is fat and gristle still attached at the base of the tongue, none of which is very appealing and all of which is easily removed after the tongue is poached. Besides availability, taste and size will influence your choice. Veal and lamb tongues are the mildest in taste, followed by beef and pork tongue. Pork tongue often comes with the head, and I prefer it in headcheese rather than by itself. Smaller lamb tongues take less time to cook, but it's more work to peel them. An average beef tongue weighs around 3 pounds / 1.4 kg; a veal tongue weighs from 3/4 to 1 1/2 pounds / 350 to 700 g; and lamb and pork tongues range from 3 to 8 ounces / 90 to 225 g. Tongue loses some of its weight during cooking, so count on about 7 to 8 3/4 ounces / 200 to 250 g uncooked weight per person.

### ***How to Prepare and Cook:***

While brining improves the tongue's flavor, it is not essential, and you can make all of these recipes with fresh tongue. But whether fresh or brined, the tongue must be poached first. If your tongue is commercially brined, it will have a pinky hue. I prefer to buy a tongue and brine it myself; that way I can control the saltiness better and eschew the pink curing salt. To brine a tongue, rinse it well under cold water, then brine it for half to one day for pork or lamb tongues and two to three days for veal or beef tongue. Remove the tongue(s) from the brine and rinse well, then poach until tender. If you're poaching a tongue that hasn't been brined, add a good pinch of some coarse sea salt to the poaching liquid. Once cooked, a tongue must be skinned, or peeled, and this needs to be done while it is still warm; otherwise the skin is very difficult, almost impossible to remove. Peeled tongues can be kept refrigerated for 4 days in their cooking liquid. Strain and keep the tongue cooking liquid, and if stock or water is required in the recipe, you can use it instead (remembering that it will be salty).

## **Recipe: Poached Tongue**

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There are many recipes (and just as many cooks) that recommend blanching tongues for a few minutes and then peeling them before cooking. No less a figure than French chef Paul Bocuse is one. Well, I know I am not in the same league as M. Bocuse, but when I followed his blanching method, the only way I could remove the skin was by cutting it off with a knife. This removed a thick layer of the meat with the skin and left the tongue looking even less appetizing than before. I even tried his method with a French tongue (that is, one procured in Paris), with the same result. Tongue must be poached until it is very tender, and you really can't overcook it.

### **Ingredients:**

21/4 to 31/3 pounds / 1 to 1.5 kg beef tongue or lamb tongues, brined (see below)  
1 small onion, quartered  
2 cloves  
1 carrot, peeled and sliced  
2 stalks celery, sliced  
6 black peppercorns  
6 allspice berries  
3 stems flat-leaf parsley  
1 clove garlic  
1 large sprig thyme  
1 fresh bay leaf

### **Method:**

Place the tongue in a large saucepan. Insert the cloves in 2 of the onion quarters and add to the pan along with the remaining onion, carrot, and celery. Add enough cold water to cover the tongue by 2 inches / 5 cm, and place the pan over medium-low heat. Bring slowly to a boil and then skim any scum from the cooking liquid. Add the peppercorns, allspice, parsley, garlic, thyme, and bay leaf. Lower the heat and simmer, partially covered, until the tongue is very tender, 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours depending on the size of the tongue. To test, pierce the tongue with a skewer at the thickest part and the tip; it should be very tender in both places.

Transfer the tongue from the poaching liquid to a plate. Have a bowl of ice water at the ready to dip your fingers into. This makes handling the hot tongue easier. Or, you may want to follow my mother's method—she wisely puts on a pair of rubber gloves to peel her hot tongue. And don't believe any recipe that tells you to cool the tongue before peeling it: tackle it as soon as your fingers, rubber gloved or not, can handle it. Once it's cold you'll have to massacre the tongue to get the skin off.

Start at the back or throat end of the tongue and use a small knife to lift up the first piece of skin. Then, using your fingers, peel the skin off as though you were taking a glove off the tongue. Be careful when you reach the tip of the tongue that you don't tear it off. Discard the skin.

Even with the skin removed, you will notice there is still a bumpy impression, mainly at the back of the tongue. You can scrape off any bumps with the back of your knife. Now trim the fat and gristle from the base and underside of the tongue and discard it.

Everyone from Thomas Keller to my mother tells you to remove throat bones. When transcribing her recipe for me, my mother noted that in recent years there have been no bones with the tongues she's bought—nor, for that matter, she added wistfully, were there any sweetbreads. Apparently, there was a time when tongues were sold with the sweetbread attached. Needless to say, if you find any bones discard them, and if you discover a sweetbread, go back to that butcher.

Put the peeled tongue back into the strained cooking liquid and leave to cool. The tongue can be kept refrigerated for 3 to 4 days in the cooking liquid.

### **All-Purpose Brine**

Makes 1 gallon / 4 l

This recipe should make enough brine for half a pig's head weighing 6 pounds / 2.75 kg; half the recipe will be enough for a beef tongue weighing 3 pounds / 1.4 kg or the equivalent weight of pork or lamb tongues. If you want your cooked meat to have a rosy hue, add 3/4 ounce / 25 g of pink curing salt to this recipe.

8 ounces / 225 g coarse sea salt  
1 cup / 6 1/4 ounces / 180 g brown sugar  
1 tablespoon toasted coriander seeds, crushed  
1 tablespoon black peppercorns, crushed  
1/2 teaspoon allspice berries, crushed  
1/2 teaspoon juniper berries, crushed  
4 cloves garlic, crushed  
4 large sprigs fresh thyme  
4 fresh bay leaves  
1 gallon / 4 l water

Place the salt, sugar, coriander, peppercorns, allspice, juniper, garlic, thyme, and bay leaves in a saucepan. Add 8 cups / 2 l of the water, then place over medium heat and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the salt and sugar. Boil for 2 minutes, then remove from the heat. Pour into a glass container, add the remaining water and leave to cool completely.

Now the brine is ready to use. Thoroughly rinse the odd bit to be brined, pat dry, and place in the brine following the recipe instructions.

## **Brining:**

Brining, or soaking food in heavily salted water, is a very old method for preserving and curing foods. The meat is submerged, for hours or days, depending on its weight, in a salt solution, and during this time osmosis occurs, increasing the amount of liquid inside the meat's cells. The result is a juicier, more flavorful piece of meat. While brine is simply a mixture of water and salt, most brines are balanced by the addition of sugar and enhanced with herbs and spices.

Use a nonreactive container for brining, such as a glass or stainless steel bowl or even a plastic bucket. The container must be large enough to submerge the odd bit completely in the brining solution, but small enough to fit in your refrigerator. Try to find one that is just wide enough to hold the meat—if the meat fits snugly in the container, you don't have to add as much brine. To estimate how much brine to make, place the odd bit you want to brine in the container and pour over enough cold water to cover. Remove the odd bit, then pour the water into a measuring jug. You can brine several odd bits in the same brine.

Your brining solution must be cold before you pour it over the meat, and you may have to weight down the meat with a plate and a weight so it's totally submerged. (I've found plastic containers filled with water or stones work well as weights). Cover the container with plastic and refrigerate for:

1/2 to 1 day for pork or lamb tongues

2 days for pig's ears and tails

2 to 3 days for calf's or beef tongue

2 to 3 days for split pig's head and feet

When you remove the meat from the brine, rinse the meat well under cold water and discard the brine.

## **Tongue with Salsa Verde**

This is a perfect dish for a hot summer night, with the soft, dense meat of the cooked tongue contrasting with the piquant salsa verde. Best of all, the bright green color of the sauce brightens up what, it must be admitted, is a dull-colored meat—especially when brined at home without pink salt. The eggs make a tasty and colorful addition and may encourage guests to taste tongue—I've made quite a few converts with this recipe. If you're serving this dish as a main course, serve it with Potato and Radish Salad. While the tongue is easier to slice cold, make sure you bring it to room temperature before serving.

Serves 4 as a main course or 6 as an appetizer

### **Ingredients:**

1 cup / 20 g arugula leaves, coarse stems removed  
1 cup / 15 g flat-leaf parsley leaves  
1 tablespoon capers, rinsed  
3 cornichons, rinsed  
2 anchovy fillets, rinsed  
1 1/2 tablespoons chopped shallot  
1 clove garlic, germ removed  
2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lemon juice  
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
Coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1 Poached Beef Tongue  
4 hard-boiled eggs, halved

### **Method:**

Place the arugula, parsley, capers, cornichons, anchovies, shallot, garlic, and lemon juice in a food processor and pulse until coarsely chopped. Add the olive oil and pulse to blend.

Tip the sauce into a bowl and season with salt and pepper. Cover by pressing plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the sauce (this keeps it green) and refrigerate. While this sauce can be made up to a day in advance, it is at its best fresh.

Slice the tongue thinly and place the slices overlapping on a platter. Arrange the eggs around the tongue and then spoon over some of the salsa verde.

*Alternatives: Veal tongue*

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