

Shopping with the Test Kitchen Canadian Bacon

To reduce the fat and calories in our **Low-Fat Spaghetti Carbonara** (page 7) without skimping on the bacon, we looked to the Great White North. Cut from the loin rather than the belly, Canadian bacon, aka “back bacon,” packs a lot of savory, smoky flavor with less than half the fat of regular bacon. After tasting five major brands, our tasters unanimously chose **Applegate Farms Canadian bacon** as their favorite. While other brands were panned for their “dry, tough” texture and “cheap deli ham” flavor, Applegate Farms was praised for its “salty, smoky balance” and “meaty, bacon-y chew.”



**APPLEGATE FARMS
CANADIAN BACON**
Our favorite brand

Apples to Apples

Apple butter was the perfect ingredient to add another layer of apple flavor to our **Cider-Braised Pork Chops** (page 18). Believed to have originated in Pennsylvania Dutch communities as a way to preserve apples for the winter months, apple butter is made by stewing apples with cider (or water) and warm spices until they break down into a thick paste. This intensely flavored preserve is used primarily as a condiment; we especially like it spread on toast or dolloped on warm pancakes. Although apple butter brands vary regionally, after tasting five brands we found that the best apple butters have a short ingredient list that includes only apples, water or cider, spices—and no added sugar.

Crystallized Ginger

We found an unlikely ingredient to add a chewy-spicy kick to our **Hermit Cookies** (page 9): crystallized ginger. This product, also called “candied ginger,” is simply peeled young ginger root that has been boiled in sugar syrup and then sprinkled with coarse sugar. Crystallized ginger has a pleasantly chewy texture and sweet, floral flavor with just a hint of raw ginger’s nasal heat. It is often sold in bulk in health food stores, but small spice jars of crystallized ginger can be found in the spice aisle of most supermarkets. Crystallized ginger can be eaten out of hand or used to lend a spicy-sweet kick to any number of confections. When purchasing, look for large, unbroken pieces of ginger that are slightly pliable. Store crystallized ginger in an airtight container at room temperature for up to three months.



CRYSTALLIZED GINGER
Chewy, sweet, and spicy.

Choosing Chops

In our recipe for **Cider-Braised Pork Chops** (page 18), we use bone-in blade chops. Cut from the shoulder end of the loin, these tough—but flavorful—chops are perfect for braising, as the moist, slow cooking helps tenderize the meat. But not all pork chops work well for all applications. Here’s how to choose the right chop.



BLADE

Though flavorful, these chops can be tough and are best suited to low-and-slow cooking methods that break down their connective tissue. Braise, barbecue, or smoke.



RIB

Tender and flavorful, but relatively lean, these chops are best suited to quick cooking techniques such as grilling and sautéing.



CENTER CUT

A T-shaped bone separates the loin and tenderloin muscles in this lean chop. Although tender and flavorful, the dual muscles make these chops a challenge to cook. Grill or sauté.