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A Good Case Of Wobbly Feet

While it may be not the most popular cut of a hog, the pig's trotter makes for a piquant and collagen-rich Teochew delicacy when turned into a gelatinous dish.

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Ham, pork belly and pork ribs are parts of the pig we are most familiar with, as they are widely consumed around the world. But the same cannot be said for the pig's trotter, which is often overlooked.

While the trotter lacks a significant amount of meat, it contains a good proportion of skin, bones, fat and connective tissue, which adds a flavoursome punch to any dish. The trotter's large quantities of fat and collagen also allow it to gelatinise and be turned into pig's trotters jelly, a traditional Teochew dish known for its "lip-sticking quality", says chef Ng Chong Guan of Chui Huay Lim Teochew Cuisine. This traditional delicacy's origins can be traced back to Swatow, a city located in China's Guangdong Province.

Pig trotter's jelly must be served cold and preferably, immediately out of the refrigerator, as the jelly-like texture will disintegrate if left at room temperature. In the olden days, it had to be left outdoors to cool and gelatinise naturally—the cooler climate in Swatow helped. Ng shares that an alternative to pork would be to use parts of the shark, since the fish's skin has similar gelatinising properties as the trotter, due to the high amount of collagen it contains.



Teochew Pig's Trotter Jelly

(Chui Huay Lim does not use chicken claw and gelatin powder in the version served at the restaurant, as the larger quantity provides sufficient natural gelatin to form the jelly-like texture.)

Serves 10

- 200gm pig skin
- 500gm pig trotter
- 150gm pork belly
- 100gm chicken claw
- 2 cinnamon quills
- 1 star anise
- 30gm ginger or galangal, for separate use
- 3l water
- 3gm sugar
- 4gm salt
- 30gm gelatin powder
- 4gm dark soya sauce

1. Place pig skin, pig trotter, pork belly, chicken claw, cinnamon quills, star anise and 15gm ginger or galangal in a pot of water. Simmer for two hours over medium-heat until ingredients are tender. Turn the heat off.
2. Remove pig skin and slice into two rectangular slices, each about the size of an A4 paper. Place one slice at the bottom of a plastic container. Using a thin metal or wooden stick, pierce holes across the skin.
3. Debone the pig trotter and mince the meat.
4. Mince the pork belly.
5. Bring the broth in step 1 back to a boil. Add ginger or galangal, sugar, salt, gelatin powder, minced pig trotter and minced pork belly. Simmer over low heat until sugar, salt and gelatin powder have dissolved. Remove the layer of oil floating on top and add dark soya sauce. Stir well. Transfer the ingredients and broth into a steel bowl large enough to contain the mixture. Place the steel bowl into a bigger bowl filled with ice to chill the mixture.
6. Once chilled, use a strainer to scoop out the ingredients and place them evenly in the plastic container over the layer of pig skin. Sprinkle 15gm finely shredded galangal evenly on top of the ingredients.
7. Add the second slice of pig skin on top of the ingredients.
8. Pour in the broth, making sure not to fill the container to the brim. Place container in the refrigerator overnight for mixture to set. The next day, remove pig trotter jelly from the container. Slice it into bite-size rectangular pieces and serve chilled.

