

Lard and Cracklings

By PETE WELLS

1 pound pork fat, chilled (leaf lard or fat back, preferably from humanely raised pork)

Salt, cayenne, paprika, black pepper, five-spice powder or other spice mix for seasoning, optional.

1. Chop the fat into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes and place in a small covered saucepan set over low heat. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water and bring to a simmer. Stir after 30 minutes.

Continue to cook, letting it bubble, and stir from time to time. When the water boils off, render for about 2 hours. The lard will clarify, and the cracklings will shrivel and shrink. As it cooks, watch and listen: turn down the heat or take the pan off the heat if it smokes or if the lard starts to brown.

2. When the cracklings are lightly golden and have almost stopped bubbling, remove them and drain on paper towels or a brown paper bag. Strain the lard through a cheesecloth into a jar or bowl, where it will keep, covered, in the refrigerator for several weeks. Try a crackling. If it is not crunchy and appetizing, crisp the rest on a baking sheet in a 375-degree oven for 15-20 minutes. Season if you'd like, then cool on paper towels. Cracklings, well drained and lightly covered, will keep at room temperature for at least a week. *Makes about 1½ cups lard and 1 cup cracklings. Adapted from "The Little House Cookbook," by Barbara M. Walker.*