

# CLASSIC TONKATSU

Ladies and gentlemen, may we have your attention, please: for your gustatory pleasure and delight, we now present the star of this chapter, tonkatsu. Here it is, the classic method, which is so incredibly satisfying, and also so easy to whip up. In this recipe, Tadashi shares a family secret—coat the pork with flour and egg twice, which makes the tonkatsu even crunchier. (Old-school tonkatsu joints in Japan, by the way, often use lard instead of oil for frying, which makes the tonkatsu even crunchier, but we’re sticking to oil and saving on the heart bypass surgery bills, thank you very much.) Be sure to use a deep-fry (or “candy”) thermometer to gauge temperature while you deep-fry; the easiest way to screw up this dish is to fry the pork too hot or too cold. In Japan, they say you deep-fry the tonkatsu until it’s the color of *kitsune*, that is, the golden brown hue of a fox. Serve the pork this way: sliced into strips, resting against a mound of shredded cabbage, slathered in tonkatsu sauce, and with a dab of sinus-clearing *karashi* mustard on the side. A bowl of steaming white rice on the side is also mandatory. Now, that’s what we call a meal, about as elemental and comforting as it gets.

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Slice the cabbage as thinly as possible (you can use a mandoline or other slicer). Follow instructions in Ultra-Crunchy Cabbage (see page 67) and set aside.

To prepare the pork fillets, lay the fillets flat on a cutting board. Tap the fillets with the back edge of a kitchen knife (the edge opposite the blade) to dig notches into the meat. Turn the knife so the flat side is facing the fillets. Pound the meat with the knife’s flat side about 6 to 8 times on each side of the pork to flatten the meat to about 1/2 inch thick. Cut 1/2-inch notches into the white fat of the fillets, which will prevent the fillet from curling when

## SERVES 4

3/4 pound cabbage, cored

4 fillets boneless pork shoulder or pork loin (about 1 pound), about 3/4 inch thick

Salt and ground black pepper

2 eggs

1/2 cup flour

2 cups panko crumbs

Vegetable oil for deep-frying

4 teaspoons Japanese *karashi* mustard (see page 234)

1/2 cup tonkatsu sauce, store-bought or homemade (page 62)

Steamed rice, for serving

frying. (Fat shrinks faster than the meat when deep-frying.) Season the fillets on both sides with salt and pepper. Transfer the prepared pork fillets to a plate.

Beat the eggs in a bowl and set aside. Prepare 4 plates. Pour the flour onto the first plate. Pour the beaten egg onto the second plate. Pour the panko onto the third plate. Leave the fourth plate empty for now (this plate will hold the breaded tonkatsu).

Place a cast-iron skillet on a burner. Fill the skillet with vegetable oil to a height of at least 1 inch. Attach a deep-fry (or

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**Classic  
Tonkatsu,**  
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“candy”) thermometer to the side of the skillet. On a work surface near the skillet, set up a tray lined with newspaper or paper towels to drain the cooked tonkatsu. Turn the heat on to high. Heat the oil to 340°F.

While the oil is heating, bread the fillets. First, dredge a fillet in flour on both sides and shake off excess flour. Second, dip the fillet into the egg, coating both sides. Third, repeat the process, dredging the pork in the flour again on both sides, then coating it again with egg on both sides. Finally, lay the fillet on the panko crumbs. Pile panko on top of the pork with your fingers, then gently press the panko onto the fillet with the palms of your hand so a generous layer of panko sticks to the fillet on both sides. Repeat with the other fillets, then place them on the empty plate you prepared earlier.

When the oil has heated to 340°F, carefully slide the fillets into the skillet. Depending on the size of the skillet, cook the tonkatsu in batches. Be careful not to overfill the skillet, which will lower the cooking temperature; use, at most, half of the surface area of the oil to cook. While the tonkatsu is cooking, check the oil temperature with a candy thermometer. Regulate the heat to maintain a constant 340°F oil temperature. If the oil is too hot, the tonkatsu will burn; if it is too low, the tonkatsu will come out soggy and greasy.

Cook the tonkatsu for about 4 minutes, turning once, until the fillets turn golden brown. When they’re ready, transfer the fillets to the paper-lined plate to drain. If possible, stand the fillets on their edges, so they drain better (you can use a metal rack to accomplish this, if you have one).

Transfer the tonkatsu to a cutting board and slice into strips. For each serving, place the pork on a plate, along with a heap of sliced cabbage and a dab of mustard. Serve topped with about 2 tablespoons of tonkatsu sauce or serve the sauce on the side, as you prefer. Serve piping hot with steamed white rice on the side.

**Other ways to eat tonkatsu** Another delicious way to enjoy tonkatsu is to eat it as a sandwich (*tonkatsu-sando*, as they say). Lay a tonkatsu fillet on a slice of bread (in Japan they typically use spongy white bread, but use any bread or roll that strikes your fancy), pour tonkatsu sauce over the fillet, cover with another slice of bread, and you’re set. Perfect for the lunch pail at school or work. Tonkatsu is also amazing cooked with eggs over a bowl of rice (see *katsudon*, page 147) or slathered with Japanese curry (page 43) instead of tonkatsu sauce. And finally, try substituting chicken for the pork to make *torikatsu*, the poultry version.