

Culinary cutups yield thrifty meals with lamb

HARRISBURG — Food shoppers often think of a leg of lamb only as a special Sunday meal or Easter dinner. But a leg of lamb may be your best buy the next time you visit the meat counter.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Division, an eight-pound leg of lamb can provide a family of four with six tasty, nutritious meals when cut properly.

Lamb is a good buy, with very little fat covering and only a minimal of marbling. Lamb is tender by nature, and by cooking at very low temperatures, down to 275°F. when time allows, the meat is one of the best you can purchase for good eating and is a diversity of cooking ideas.

You can save hundreds of dollars a year if you learn to do your own meat cutting. Boning a leg of lamb is as easy as boning a chicken breast.

The secret is the proper tools, starting with a good, sharp five-inch boning knife. Sharp is the key word. Knives should be sharpened on a 20 to 25 degree angle, both ways. A sharper angle on one side of a knife will take the edge off, rather than put it on. Eight to 10 strokes per side will usually put a keen edge on the blade. You will also need a whetstone, oil stone or sharpening steel; a breaking or butcher knife; and a cutting board.

These tools are available at kitchen equipment shops, houseware departments, a butcher or restaurant supply shop.

When purchasing a fresh leg of lamb, the first part of your six meal culinary cut-up begins before you leave the store. Since most consumers do not own a meat saw, ask your butcher to cut four, one-inch steaks from the sirloin end of the leg. Of, if you prefer a roast, remove the sirloin section in one piece.

After the steaks are cut, remove the "fell" (the outer parchment-like skin) and excess fat. If the fell is left on, it will shrink and cause the steaks to curl when cooking. If you cut off the entire sirloin to be used as a roast, leave the fell on to preserve the natural juices when roasting.

The portion of leg with the sirloin removed is a "3/4 leg," most commonly seen in retail meat cases. It can be roasted as is, or deboned and formed into rolled roast, a butterflied leg, or cut into many different meal portions.

To debone the 3/4 leg, turn the left, with the exposed rump bone up. Run the knife along the rump bone, working the knife around the bone to loosen it. Keep the blade close to the bone, feeling the bone with your knife, taking short strokes.

After the rump bone is removed, start cutting at the ball joint of the

center leg bone. Make a straight cut at the approximate center of the leg until your blade reaches the next joint, known as the stifle joint. Work the point of the blade around this joint and length of the center bone until the bone is totally exposed. Remove the bone and put it with the other soup bones.

The shank bone which runs from the small end of the leg to the middle is next. Using the same technique as with the rump bone, work the knife around the shank bone until it is completely exposed. Remove the shank bone and put it with the others (The learning process takes time in boning, but even your mistakes are edible.)

Now that the bone is removed,

cut the "butterflied leg" into four sections, following the natural major seams. This will give you a small round outside muscle; the center muscle, the sirloin muscle and shank muscle. Bone placements will help you identify names of muscle by relating to which bone was removed from each area.

Taking the outside muscle, cut the thickest portion across the grain into one-inch slices. You will get at least four nice size filets. You can use these slices for broiling, grilling or pan broiling.

Cubes of shish kebabs and fondues can be cut from the sirloin muscle with cubes for stew cut from the shank muscle.

The thinner portion of the leg, (the center muscle) can be sliced into strips for stroganoff.

Congratulations! Your leg of lamb is now bones for soup, cubes for stew, sirloin steaks, lamb strips, fondue, lamb fillets and shish kebab.

For more information on cutting and cooking lamb, write to the American Lamb Council, 200 N. Clayton Street, Denver, CO., 80206.



Hints for cooking lamb

HARRISBURG — Whether you are a weekend barbecue chef, the family gourmet or the continental cuisine specialist, lamb can be easily prepared by everyone, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

Lamb has a delicate flavor and tenderness which makes it a favorite meal when cooked properly. Cook it at moderate heat for most dishes. All protein foods toughen and shrink excessively when cooked at a sustained heat. (However, cook the meat to the

doneness you prefer). Lamb roasts are generally cooked anywhere from 140 degrees (rare), to 170 degrees (well done) internal temperature. A roast should stand in a warm place 15 to 20 minutes when it is removed from the oven, to make slicing easier. During this time, the roast continues to cook inside and the internal temperature rises from five to ten degrees.

If fresh lamb is to be used within a day or two, leave it in the film wrapping and store it in the coldest part of the refrigerator, at 32 to 40 degrees. If the meat is to be stored more than two days, remove the wrappings and cover loosely with

wax paper. Freeze the lamb if it is not to be used by the end of the fourth day.

Ground lamb should not be kept unfrozen more than 24 hours since ground meat does not have the keeping quality of solid pieces. Variety meats, such as liver, kidney and heart, do not keep well either, and should be used as soon as purchased, frozen or precooked.

Lamb need not be defrosted before cooking. Frozen leg, loin or shoulder roasts should be cooked at 300 to 325 degrees and rib roasts at 350 to 375 degrees allowing one-third to one-half longer for cooking as for fresh meat.

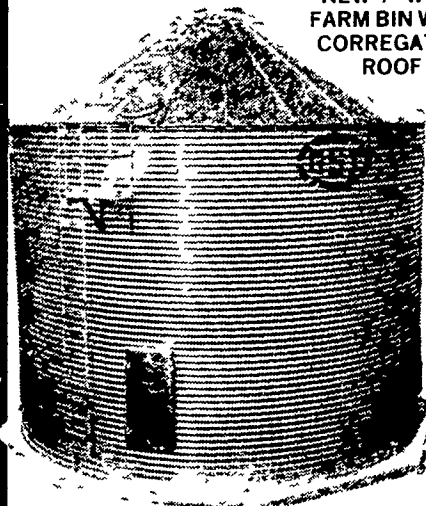
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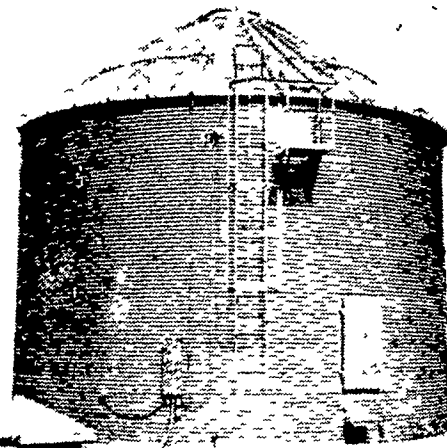


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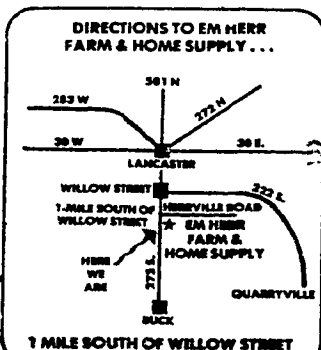
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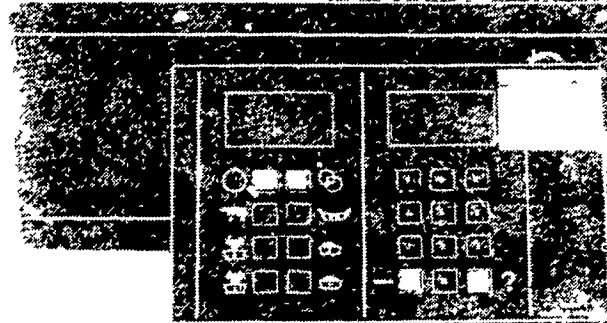
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