



Home on the Range



Secrets For Serving Lamb

DENVER, Colo. — While home cooks principally serve lamb for springtime feasts or a special holiday occasion, succulent lamb entrees are featured on restaurant menus year-round. In fact, lamb's popularity in restaurants has increased by 50-percent in recent years.

So do professional chefs possess special secrets about lamb? Acclaimed chefs including Jim Botsacos of Molyvos Restaurant in New York City, Pano Karatasos of Kyma Restaurant in Atlanta, Melissa Perello of Charles Nob Hill Restaurant in San Francisco, and Brooke Vosika of the Four Seasons Hotel in New York, are prime "lambassadors" who all generously reveal their lamb lore.

One secret that's necessary to share, it seems, is that all cuts of lamb are freshly available and affordable beyond spring, throughout every season. In the United States alone, there are more than 75,000 lamb producers yielding high quality, fresh domestic products every day.

Another secret is that lamb is easy to prepare, and in many popular "all American" and ethnic styles. "American lamb, in particular, is sweet, tender and mildly flavored, so it soaks up an array of marinades and seasonings," said Chef Botsacos. "Lamb has a great affinity with many seasonal herbs and spices, which is one reason it's a highly revered meat in the Caribbean, Europe and along the Mediterranean shores."

The mild flavor profile of American lamb can come as a pleasant surprise to some home cooks who may generalize all lamb products as having a strong, even gamy, taste. This is a misperception when it comes to domestically raised lamb, which is freshly available and primarily grain fed to produce its clean milk flavor and high meat-to-bone ratio.

"American lamb's distinctive taste holds up perfectly with numerous cooking methods," said Chef Perello. She adds that various lamb cuts are ideal for grilling, broiling, roasting, braising, stewing, sauteing, and stir-frying.

Many leading specialty food retailers are featuring a larger array of lamb cuts in the meat case year-round due to the latest culinary trends. "Our customers are seeking alternatives to mainstream beef, pork, and chicken because of the strong shift in both creative and ethnic cooking styles seen in restaurants," said Edward Penfold, a butcher at the popular Fox and Obel gourmet

marketplace in Chicago. "Another trend lamb supports is the focus on protein diets, as customers want to savor flavorful protein options."

Four Seasons' Chef Vosika, whose American lamb entrees change with the leaves, believes in the idea of "Sunday Lamb" to be regularly enjoyed by couples. On lazy Sundays, couples can savor the aromas of slow cooked lamb.

Chef Karatasos believes that while lamb is certainly an impressive dish to mark a special occasion, it can easily be prepared anytime at home. "Ground lamb is an appetizing way to extend lamb's holiday welcome in the American kitchen and backyard grills. It could be used for savory appetizer meatballs, or for seasonally spiced lamb burgers — the ultimate gourmet burger."

American lamb is the leanest, meatiest lamb in the world, thanks to sophisticated breeding and nutrition programs. Unlike most red meats, lamb does not have a "marbling" of saturated fat throughout its cuts. This makes for one of the leanest red meats one can eat. With most of the fat limited to the outside edges, it's easily trimmed. A recent study shows that only about 36-percent of the fat in lamb is saturated. The rest is mono or polyunsaturated, the "good" fat in one's diet.

Lamb is also relatively low in calories, as some cuts of a cooked, lean, three-ounce serving constitutes less than 200 calories. Its protein is nutritionally complete, providing all eight amino acids in the proper ratio and it is high in B vitamins, niacin, zinc, and iron. All nutrition facts reference the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 16 (July 2003).

A variety of American lamb cuts are comparable in price to other finer beef and pork cuts, according to Penfold. Shoulder cuts are among the most flavorful, and always a good value regardless of the time of year.

If a particular cut is not in the meat case, that doesn't mean it's not available. "Just ask the butcher, and pre-order whenever possible" is the advice of Tom Koulris, chairman of the American Lamb Board. "Butchers and grocery stores can obtain fresh product quickly from any American lamb supplier anytime of the year."

For recipe ideas from the American Lamb Board, visit www.lambinfo.com.

LAMB PATTIES WITH YOGURT MINT SAUCE

1 pound lean ground lamb
¼ cup chopped fresh mint
¼ cup dry bread crumbs
1 teaspoon lemon pepper
Lightly mix together lamb, bread crumbs, mint, and lemon pepper. Shape into patties. Broil or grill 10 minutes or until desired doneness.

Yogurt Mint Sauce:

¾ cup plain yogurt
¼ cup firmly packed fresh mint leaves
1 teaspoon sugar

Combine sauce ingredients in a blender or food processor and process until smooth with tiny flecks of mint. Serve sauce over patties.

LAMB LOAF

1½ pounds lean ground lamb
1 cup milk
1 egg beaten
¾ cup cracker crumbs
¼ cup finely chopped green pepper
¼ cup finely chopped onions
¼ cup ketchup
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

1 teaspoon prepared mustard
¼ teaspoon ground pepper

In 2-quart mixing bowl, combine lamb, milk, egg, cracker crumbs, green pepper, and onions. Mix well. In small bowl, mix together ketchup, salt, Worcestershire sauce, mustard, and pepper. Mix thoroughly. Place lamb mixture in loaf pan or form loaf and place in baking pan. Pour ketchup mixture over lamb. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes to 1 hour, or until done.

CARBONNADE OF LAMB NIMOISE

Layer the following in a glass 9x13-inch dish:

2 slices chopped raw bacon
1 pound cooked lamb, in cubes
1 medium onion, chopped, combined with 1 clove pressed garlic
4 cups diced raw potatoes
2 slices chopped raw bacon
1 green pepper, chopped
1 tomato, chopped (or 1 cup cooked, diced, or stewed tomatoes)
¼ cup freshly chopped parsley, or 4 teaspoons dried parsley.

Sprinkle with salt and pepper and drizzle with olive oil. Cover loosely with aluminum foil and bake at 425 degrees for 20 minutes. Lower heat to 300 degrees and bake 1 hour until potatoes are tender. Remove foil. Sprinkle with ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese. Bake 15 minutes longer.

Recipe is from the Languedoc region of France.

~I buy Parmesan or Romano cheeses, grate them, and store in glass jars in my freezer. The Parmesan cheese available all ready grated in the familiar green can at the market has sawdust in it (referred to as "cellulose") to keep it from caking. I prefer the pure cheese.

Shepherds' Ridge Farm

IRISH LAMB STEW

Put 2 tablespoons flour, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper into a paper bag. Add 1½ pounds lamb cubes, about 1-inch square, trimmed of fat. Shake to cover lamb with flour mixture. Brown in 3 batches in hot fat.



Lamb is easy to prepare, and one of the leanest red meats one can eat.

Featured Recipe

"Lamb has been our red meat for most of our married life, and for all of my growing up years with my parents," writes a reader who sent in a variety of lamb recipes from Shepherd's Ridge Farm. No additional address or name was attached, but her comments are worth printing.

She writes, "I have heard every comment imaginable about how awful the flavor of lamb is: 'It tastes like the barnyard or wet wool or bumblebees.' 'Truly, I didn't know people ate such things so that they could compare the flavor with lamb.'

"The most common observation is that you need to know how to cook it.

"Nonsense! Lamb is cooked like any other meat. I have converted my beef recipes to use lamb or mutton — yes, we eat that, too. Lamb is to veal what mutton is to beef — full-flavored and delicious."

The featured recipe is from Shepherd's Ridge Farm. "The combination of ingredients may sound questionable to some, but this is absolutely delicious," the reader writes. She gave this recipe to her husband's cousin who buys lamb from them. The cousin reported the lamb was so good, she wished they had dinner guests to share it with.

FRUITED LAMB CHOPS

6 ¾-inch thick loin lamb chops
¼ cup chopped onions
2 tablespoons olive oil or butter
2 cups stewed tomatoes
½ cup small pieces of mixed dried fruits and berries
¼ cup brown sugar
¾ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon pepper
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground allspice
½ teaspoon ground cloves
½ teaspoon ginger
½ teaspoon mace
½ teaspoon nutmeg

Shake loins in flour and brown in hot oil. Add onions and saute until onions are tender. Add stewed tomatoes, and dried fruits and berries to lamb chops.

Stir together sugar, salt, pepper, cinnamon, allspice, cloves, ginger, mace, and nutmeg, and add to skillet ingredients. Simmer 20-25 minutes. Sprinkle ¼ cup flour over sauce to thicken. Serve over cooked rice or pasta.

Add ½ teaspoon dill seeds and 3 cups water. Cover and simmer 1½ hours, or until tender.

Add the following:

8 small onions, halved
3 carrots, in 1-inch slices
2 potatoes, cubed (I scrub them and let the skins on for better nutrition).

Cover and cook 25 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Add 2 cups fresh or frozen peas. Return to heat and cook 5 minutes. Combine ½ cup light cream and 2 tablespoons flour. Stir into stew and cook until thickened.

Shepherds' Ridge Farm

SCOTS' BROTH

3 pounds ground lamb, browned and drained
8 cups water
¼ cup split peas
¼ cup pearl barley
Add water to lamb. Bring to

boil and cook 20 minutes. Chill broth overnight and remove congealed fat next day.

Soak peas overnight in water. Drain next day and add to lamb and broth. Add barley and cook for 1½ hours.

Add the following to broth, simmering gently for 1 hour. Stir frequently.

1 large carrot, chopped
1 large onion, chopped
2 leeks, split lengthwise, wash and chop white part and tender green part
2 celery ribs, chopped

1 large peeled turnip, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
This is a wonderfully hearty and healthful soup, perfect for autumn and winter meals.

Shepherds' Ridge Farm

Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients, and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Be sure to include your name and address. Recipes should reach our office one week before the publishing date listed below.

Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522.

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