

Lamb Recipes & Tips by *Here & Now* Resident Chef Kathy Gunst

Kathy's Tips for Cooking Lamb

The best way to tell if lamb is properly cooked is to take its internal temperature. These temperatures are for the final cooking temperature, which means you want to take the meat out of the oven when it is 5 to 10 degrees below the desired temperature because the meat will continue to cook once it's been removed from the oven:

- 125 degrees for rare, or very pink meat
- 130 to 135 degrees for medium rare, or slightly pink meat
- 140 degrees for medium meat or meat that is not pink
- 150 to 155 degrees for well done, or meat with absolutely no sign of pinkness

Best cuts for roasting lamb:

- Leg (bone in or boneless)
- Rack
- Shoulder

How much meat per person?

- For a bone in leg: about 3/4 to 1 pound per person (with some leftovers)
- For rack of lamb: about 1/2 or 1/4 rack per person (depending on what else you are having) or 2 to 4 chops
- For a boneless butterfly of lamb: about 3/4 pound per person (with some leftovers)

Middle Eastern-Style Meatballs with Spiced Yogurt-Mint Sauce

Kathy's Note: Ground lamb is mixed with aromatic spices and yogurt, formed into small meatballs, and cooked in olive oil until crisp and golden brown. The meatballs can be made ahead of time and reheated in a warm 300 degree oven for about 5 minutes, or until warm. The Spiced Yogurt-Mint Sauce can be made a day ahead of time. The recipe makes 30 one-inch meatballs, but can easily be doubled for a party.

Makes 20 to 25 one-inch meatballs

Ingredients:

The Spice Mixture:

- 1 tablespoon coriander seeds
- 1 tablespoon fennel seeds
- 1/2 tablespoon cumin seeds
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

The Spiced Yogurt-Mint Sauce:

- 1/3 cup fresh mint leaves
- 1 scallion, ends trimmed
- 1 cup Greek-style or whole milk yogurt

1 tablespoon olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 ½ to 2 tablespoons spice mixture, see below

The Meatballs:

About 3 tablespoons olive oil
1 small onion, finely chopped, about ½ cup
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 pound ground lamb
1 1/2 tablespoon chopped fresh mint
1 egg
2/3 cup dried breadcrumbs, plus about ½ cup dried breadcrumbs
3 tablespoons Greek-style or whole milk yogurt
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Instructions:

Make the spice mixture: in a small skillet mix the coriander, fennel, and cumin seeds set over low heat. Cook for about 4 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the seeds are fragrant. Be careful not to let them burn. Remove from the heat and place in a small spice grinder and grind, or use a mortar and pestle to grind the spices finely. Set aside.

Make the yogurt sauce: place the mint in the container of a food processor and pulse until chopped. Add the yogurt, salt, pepper, and 1 1/2 to 2 tablespoons of the above spice mixture. Taste for seasoning; cover and refrigerate until ready to serve. The sauce can be made a day ahead of time.

Make the meatballs: in a medium skillet heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil over low heat. Add the onion, garlic, salt and pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool.

Meanwhile in a large bowl mix the ground lamb, cooked onion/garlic mixture, mint, egg, 2/3 cup of the breadcrumbs, yogurt, salt, pepper, and 1 to 1 1/2 tablespoons of the spice mixture. Use your hands or a spoon to mix all the ingredients so everything is fully incorporated.

Place the remaining 1/2 cup breadcrumbs on a plate. Use about 1 heaping tablespoon of the mixture to form each meatball; they should be about 1-inch in diameter. Roll the meatballs in the breadcrumbs, a few at a time, be careful to shake off any excess breadcrumbs, and place on a cookie sheet. Repeat with the remaining meatball mixture and breadcrumbs, adding more breadcrumbs to the plate, if needed. You should have 20-25 meatballs. You can make the meatballs several hours ahead of time; cover and refrigerate

Make the meatballs: preheat the oven to 300 degrees. In a large skillet heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil over moderate heat. Test to make sure the oil is hot—a fleck of breadcrumbs should sizzle right up. Cook about 5 to 6 (or as many as fit in the skillet without touching) meatballs at a time for 7 minutes, turning them from side to side until they are golden brown on all sides and cooked through (cut one open to check—go ahead and eat it if it's cooked through with no sign of pinkness). Drain on paper towels and repeat with the remaining meatballs. Place the drained meatballs on a cookie sheet and place in the warm oven to keep hot. You shouldn't need any excess oil but if the skillet seems

dry add another tablespoon of oil. Repeat with the remaining meatballs and serve hot with the yogurt sauce on the side.

Roast Leg of Lamb with Fresh Figs and Shallots

Kathy's Note: This recipe takes advantage of the natural affinity between figs and lamb. The meaty flavor of lamb seems to bring out the savory, meaty essence of fresh figs. Try to make this dish in the late summer-early fall when fresh figs are available. But you can also make the dish year-round, using dried figs; see note below.

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients:

One 5-pound leg of lamb, bone-in, trimmed of excess fat
2 garlic cloves, very thinly sliced
10 garlic cloves, peeled and left whole
1/3 cup balsamic vinegar, plus 2 tablespoons
¼ cup soy sauce
1 cup dry red wine
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons grated or chopped fresh ginger
2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
Pinch salt
Generous grinding black pepper
24 shallots, peeled and left whole, or 16 small onions
1/3 cup good-quality honey, preferably an herb-flavored honey (see page 00)
12 fresh figs or 12 dried figs*, ends trimmed

*If using dried figs, cut the figs into quarters. Place the figs in a bowl and cover with ½ cup red wine and 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar for about 15 minutes to an hour. The figs will soak up the wine and take on its flavor, and the figs often tough texture will soften.

Instructions:

Place the lamb in a roasting pan, fat side up. Make several small slits in the skin using a small sharp knife. Insert the thin slivers of garlic into the slits. Place the whole garlic cloves around the roast, and into any crevices you find on the meat. Pour the 1/3 cup of balsamic vinegar, and the soy sauce, wine, and olive oil over the meat and sprinkle the ginger, rosemary, salt, and pepper on top. Cover, refrigerate, and let marinate at least 1 hour, and up to 24 hours.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. If using marinated dried figs, tuck them under the roast. The meat juices will drip on the figs, making them unbelievably flavorful. If using fresh figs, cut them in half and place in a small bowl, cover with the remaining 2 tablespoons of vinegar and let sit for 20 minutes. Scatter the shallots around the lamb. Roast the lamb on the middle rack, uncovered, for 20 minutes.

After the lamb has roasted for 20 minutes, remove from the oven and baste. Using a spoon or a pastry brush, spoon the honey onto the lamb. Place the fresh figs onto the honey, pressing very lightly to make

them stick. Roast another 45 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes more, or until the internal temperature of the lamb is 125 for rare and 135 for well done (depending on the size of the roast). The lamb will continue to cook when removed from the oven, so be careful not to overcook it.

Let the meat rest, loosely covered with aluminum foil, for about 5 to 10 minutes before carving. Pour the pan juices into a small saucepan, removing any excess fat floating on the top. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the temperature to low and simmer 5 minutes to reduce and concentrate the flavors. Serve the lamb in slices, topped with the reduced pan juices, figs, and shallots.

Lamb Hash

Kathy's Note: This is one of the great ways to use leftover roast lamb. Serve topped with poached eggs, and accompany with toast.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

2 teaspoons olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
1 scallion, finely chopped
1 cup cooked and diced potatoes
1 cup roasted (leftover) lamb, diced
1 tablespoon fresh thyme
About 2 tablespoons leftover gravy, if you have it
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Dash hot pepper sauce
1/3 cup finely chopped fresh parsley

Instructions:

In a medium sized heavy skillet, heat the oil over low heat. Add the onions and scallion and cook, stirring, for 6 minutes. Add the potatoes, lamb, thyme, and gravy and cook, stirring for 3 minutes. Add salt, pepper, and hot pepper sauce and half the parsley and cook, pressing the mixture down with a flat spatula into the pan to create a kind of pancake. Let cook until the edges look crispy and, using a large, flat spatula, flip the hash over. Press down again to form a pancake. Cook another few minutes, or until the hash is crisp and golden brown. Serve sprinkled with the remaining parsley.

Lamb Chop "Lollipops" with Spice Rub

Kathy's Note: Ask your butcher to French-cut the lamb chops so there is a long rib without any meat, making it easy to hold the chop by the bone. The lamb bone acts like a lollipop stick. Be sure to make enough chops so everyone can have at least one.

Serves 8

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon dry rosemary
½ tablespoon dry thyme
½ tablespoon cumin seed
½ tablespoon fennel seeds
Dash red chile flakes
Dash sea salt
Coarsely ground black pepper
8 Frenched lamb chops

Instructions:

Place the rosemary, thyme, cumin seed, fennel seed, chile flakes, salt and pepper in a spice grinder and coarsely grind. Alternately, if you don't have a spice grinder, ground them using a mortar and pestle.

Pat a very light sprinkling of the spice mixture onto each side of the lamb chop, patting it onto the meat so it adheres and place the chops on a broiler pan or in a large ovenproof skillet. (The chops can be coated with spices, covered and refrigerated, for several hours before cooking.)

Preheat the broiler placing the rack about 8 inches away from the heat. Broil the chops for about 4 to 5 minutes on each side, depending on the thickness, for medium-rare meat. Remove from the oven and let cool for a minute. Place on a serving platter and pass with a pile of nice cocktail napkins.
