

Slow-cooked lamb shoulder

This is my favourite way to cook lamb shoulder. Your lamb will be meltingly tender, juicy and full of flavour. You can keep the shoulder whole and present it at the table. You won't need a carving knife – just spoons and forks to pull off pieces of soft meat. Or you can remove the meat from the bones after it has cooked (as described below) and serve it individually plated. You could pair it with mashed or roast potatoes, a root vegetable gratin, or rice. I think it's particularly delicious with barley or spelt 'risotto', with a dose of salsa verde on top.



The recipe takes some time, but is far from difficult. It's based on the method I used at Chez Panisse, where we cut the shoulders from the lamb carcasses, trimmed and seasoned them the day before. For best results I recommend starting two days in advance. On the first day, trim and season the meat. On the second, cook it, remove the bones and strain the sauce. On the third, skim off the remaining fat and reheat gently.

Serves: 6-8 depending on size of shoulder

1 lamb shoulder on the bone

salt & pepper

splash of olive oil

2 large onions, peeled and chopped into large chunky pieces

1 large carrot, peeled and roughly chopped

1 large celery stick, roughly chopped

1 leek, roughly chopped and washed well

1 whole head of garlic, sliced in half along its equator (no need to peel)

1 red hot chilli (fresh or dried)

an unwaxed lemon

several sprigs of parsley

several sprigs of thyme

2 bay leaves

approx 500ml white wine

approx 750ml chicken stock

1. If your shoulder of lamb looks very fatty, trim some fat off. It's not essential, but you can use your fingers and the tip of a knife to open up the flap of meat on the underside to reveal a seam of fat and unsightly gland beneath. Cut these out and fold back the flap. You can also cut off the skin, if the butcher hasn't already, or leave it on (like in the picture below).
2. A day (or at least several hours) in advance of cooking, season meat well all over with salt and pepper and keep chilled until an hour before it goes in the oven.

3. Heat oven to 200C with a rack in middle. Heat a roasting tin (big enough to hold the shoulder) on stove over a medium-high flame and add a slug of olive oil. Throw in onion, carrot, celery and leek and cook, stirring often, until slightly softened and caramelised. Turn off heat.
4. Scatter over herbs, chilli and garlic. Use a vegetable peeler to shave lozenges of lemon zest over. Lay shoulder on top and pour round wine and stock. It should be $\frac{3}{4}$ submerged. If needed, top up with stock or water. Cover tightly with foil.
5. Cook in oven for approx 45 mins or until liquid is simmering. Now open up a corner of foil to let steam escape, reduce temperature to 160C, and cook a further 45 mins or until meat is starting to pull away from bone. Remove foil and continue cooking for a further two hours until meat is very tender. *NB During this stage turn shoulder over every half an hour, so it browns evenly.*
6. Carefully remove meat to a board and let rest until cool enough to handle. Meanwhile strain sauce through a sieve, pressing down on vegetables to extract all juices. Let sauce sit so fat rises to top, and skim off what you can. At this point you can boil the sauce to concentrate its flavour.
7. Pull meat from bones, keeping it in large chunks. Place in a container and cover with strained sauce. Chill overnight, letting flavours deepen further.
8. The next day, discard any fat that has solidified at the surface. Gently reheat sauce and meat in a large saucepan, until simmering. Don't forget to check seasoning.

