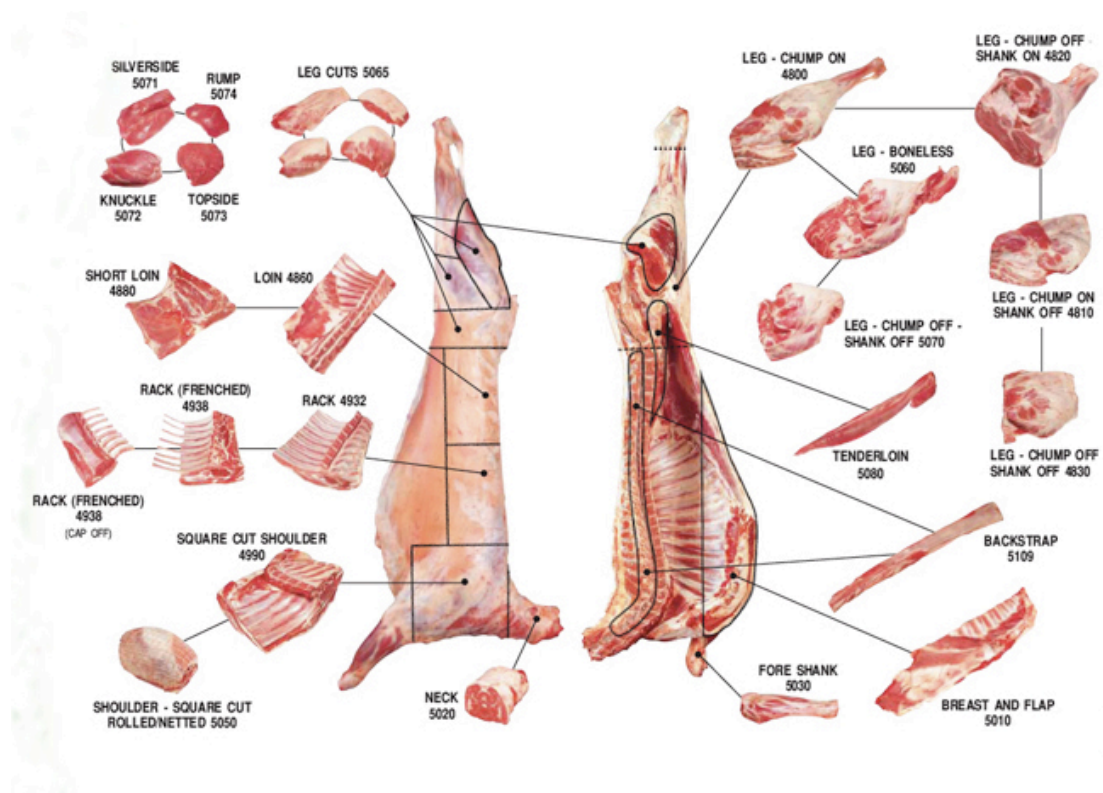


LAMB



Lamb is produced from animals less than a year old. Since the quality of lamb varies according to the age of the animal, it is advisable to buy lamb that has been USDA-graded.

USDA Prime: Prime grade lamb is very high in tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. It has moderate marbling, which enhances both flavor and juiciness. Prime chops and roasts are excellent for dry-heat cooking (broiling and roasting).

USDA Choice: Choice grade lamb has slightly less marbling than Prime, but still is of very high quality. Choice chops and roasts also are very tender, juicy, and flavorful and suited to dry-heat cooking.

Lower grades of lamb and mutton (USDA Good, Utility, and Cull) are seldom marked with the grade if sold at retail. Most cuts of USDA Prime and Choice lamb - including shoulder cuts - are tender and can be oven roasted, broiled, or pan broiled. A leg of lamb graded Choice or Prime, for example, is delectable when oven roasted. The less tender cuts - the breast, riblets, neck, and shank - can be

braised slowly to make excellent (and tender) lamb dishes. Meat from older sheep is called yearling mutton or mutton and, if it is graded, these words will be stamped on the meat along with the shield-shaped grade mark. Grades for yearling mutton and mutton are the same as for lamb, except that mutton does not qualify for the Prime grade and the Cull grade applies only to mutton.

The best way to identify lamb cuts is with the lamb carcass chart shown above. These terms are generally recognized throughout the meat industry.

Lamb Cooking Tips

There are two general methods used for cooking lamb: dry heat and moist heat. In dry heat cooking (grilling, rotisserie, broiling, roasting, sautéing, pan-frying), the lamb meat is in direct contact with a hot surface or close to the heat source. High heat is used to quickly brown the surface and any additional cooking is at a somewhat lower temperature. This method works best for tender lamb cuts, although tougher lamb cuts, which have been tenderized (with a marinade), can be cooked successfully with dry heat.

With moist heat methods (braising and stewing), the lamb meat is cooked in contact with hot liquid, usually at a low temperature. The hot liquid tenderizes the lamb meat and it also acts as a flavoring source. Moist heat methods are usually used on tougher cuts, such as lamb shoulder or lamb shank because these generally are more flavorful than the popular cuts and simply require a slower cooking method. However moist heat methods may also be used, with care, for tender lamb cuts, such as cuts from the lamb leg.

Grilling and Broiling Lamb

Grilling is a dry heat method that is the most popular cooking technique for lamb. The grilling cooking method cooks lamb with a high heat source, either directly, indirectly, or with a combination of both. It is essentially the same technique as broiling except that when grilling, the food is cooked above the heat source and

with broiling; the food is cooked below the heat source. Because of its natural tenderness, lamb is ideal for grilling.

Meat for grilling or broiling lamb should be tender, fairly lean, and not too thick, since it needs to cook quickly.

Lamb cuts that are perfect choices for grilling or broiling lamb include Butterflied leg of lamb, lamb chops, lamb steaks, lamb tenderloin, lamb ribs, lamb kebabs, ground lamb patties, bone-in leg of lamb shoulder, and rack of lamb and lamb loin roast.

Other lamb legs to be grilled are often Butterflied, to provide a more uniform thickness. A Butterflied leg is a great grill idea for a crowd.

When grilling or broiling, thinner cuts of lamb can be closer to the heat source than thicker lamb cuts because the thicker lamb cut will require more time to cook.

Lamb Steaks and Lamb Chops need about 5-6 minutes on each side per inch of thickness.

Grill lamb at least 4" from moderate heat. If a thicker cut of lamb is too close to the heat source, the surface will char before the interior is cooked to the proper degree of doneness.

When grilling or broiling, cook lamb burgers until medium doneness.

In either grilling or broiling, lamb meat should be turned when it's half-done, using tongs to avoid puncturing the meat.

Brush lamb shanks with barbecue sauce and wrap in foil to grill.

Marinate lamb in the refrigerator.

Marinades should be used only once and discarded.

Roasting Lamb

Roasting is a dry heat method that may use a small amount of fat or oil as a baste.

The lamb meat is cooked in an oven or on a rotating spit over a fire, gas flame or electric grill bars.

Some lamb meat cuts suit high temperature roasting while others are better roasted at low temperatures.

Leg of lamb is best roasted at low to moderate temperatures. This results in less shrinkage and better serving yields.

Lamb chops and frenched rack of lamb are better rare-roasted at higher temperatures, or first seared then roasted.

Slow roast: low temperature, under 325°F (but no less than 212°F)

Moderate roasting temperature, 350°F to 375°F

Fast roast: high temperature, 400°F or over

Sear then roast: brush lean surfaces with oil. Brown lamb meat all over in a hot, dry pan then transfer to moderate oven, 350°F, to complete cooking

If possible, take lamb meat from refrigerator about 30 minutes before cooking.

Sear or brown rack of lamb and lamb chops first. Pre-searing a roasting lamb cut in a hot pan improves colour and flavour, particularly when using small, very lean lamb cuts that need only short cooking.

Roast on a lamb rack. When practical, place lamb on a rack to roast. This allows even heat circulation and browning.

Netting and trussing. Netting or twine may be used to hold plain or filled leg of lamb cuts in an even shape for cooking, portioning and carving.

Roasting lamb at moderate heat maximizes juiciness and minimizes shrinkage. Lamb leg roasts are often cooked this way.

Roasting lamb at high heat for the entire cooking time maximizes the brown crusty surface, but this method shouldn't be used on large pieces of lamb because the surface will dry out and may burn before the interior is done.

Resting after roasting. After cooking, before carving or serving lamb, allow lamb meat to rest, approximately five minutes for every pound of meat. For example: 15 minutes for a 3 pound leg of lamb roast. Resting enables temperature to even out, the meat fibres to relax and re-absorb some of the juices. The relaxed lamb meat becomes more tender and easier to carve with less loss of juices.

An alternative method for roasting lamb is to begin with a temperature of 425°F - 450°F for an initial 10 - 15 minutes to brown the lamb meat and then continue cooking at 325°F to the desired doneness.

To prevent lean lamb cuts from drying out while cooking, the lamb meat may be rubbed with oil prior to roasting and/or basted with pan juices during roasting.

Utilize a meat thermometer to make sure a lamb roast has reached a particular stage of doneness. Insert the meat thermometer into the meatiest part of the lamb, not into fat or against bone.

Although the fat keeps the lamb meat moist and tender during the roasting process, it can be trimmed before serving because it is not very flavorful and is actually quite unpleasant after it has cooled.

Tougher lamb cuts from the lamb shoulder should be braised or roasted.

Rotisserie Lamb

Rotisserie is a dry heat method that is a long slow process, which allows the fat in the lamb meat to melt slowly slow cooking process. Cuts of lamb that have a basic cylindrical shape and a fairly even distribution of weight are suitable for cooking on a rotisserie. Good choices include leg of lamb, rolled lamb shoulder, and whole lamb.

For rotisserie cooking, choose only compact, cylindrical lamb roasts for best results.

Sautéing Lamb

Sautéing is a dry heat method cooking thin cuts of lamb in a small quantity of hot fat in an uncovered pan. Sautéing differs from frying in that less fat is used. It is actually the same process as searing except that sautéing completely cooks the

lamb meat and searing is simply a means to brown the lamb meat so that the cooking process can be completed with another method (usually when cooking thicker lamb cuts). Sautéing is a simple and quick cooking method for small lamb cuts in a pan containing seasoning, and a small amount of oil, fat or butter.

Always preheat your pan.

Keep lamb medium rare for the most tender moist cut.

Lamb for sautéing should be tender and not more than an inch thick.

When sautéing lamb, it is important that the meat surface is dry so that when it is placed into the pan, it browns rather than steams.

When sautéing lamb, the pan should not be crowded; cook in small batches if necessary.

Lamb chops and lamb liver are good choices for sautéing.

Pan-Frying Lamb

Pan-frying is similar to sautéing with a few exceptions: more oil is used; the cuts of lamb do not have to be thin; and the cooking process requires more time than sautéing. Pan-frying is a perfect method for cooking small, tender lamb such as lamb chops, ground lamb patties, and lamb steaks.

The goal of pan-frying is to produce lamb meat that has a brown, crispy surface with tender, juicy, and flavorful lamb meat inside.

A large, well-seasoned, cast-iron skillet works well or a heavy nonstick pan may be used.

The skillet used for pan-frying should have a heavy bottom so that heat will be conducted more easily.

Make sure the pan is of adequate size so that there is plenty of room for the lamb meat to brown.

Following the same basic steps as sautéing, the skillet should be preheated over medium-high heat. Oil is added to the heated pan in a quantity great enough to well coat the pan (less oil is used when sautéing).

Like sautéing, high heat is used to sear the lamb meat to create a flavorful browned crust.

The lamb meat should be patted with paper towels to remove excess moisture.

Unlike sautéing, the lamb can be turned more than once (after the lamb meat is seared) because the pieces are larger and require a longer cooking time.

Tongs or spatulas are the best instruments to use.

Lamb blade, arm, or loin lamb chops up to an inch thick are good choices for pan-frying.

Braising/Stewing Lamb

Braising and stewing lamb involve the slow cooking of meat in a liquid. This cooking method tenderizes and softens tough lamb cuts and allows for rich and subtle blending of the lamb meat flavors with those of the liquid and seasonings.

The main differences between braising and stewing lamb are:

The size of the lamb meat used: Braising requires the use of whole, market ready lamb cuts while the stewing process requires that small pieces of lamb meat be used.

The quantity of liquid: Braising requires that the level of the liquid be halfway up the side of the lamb meat while stewing requires the pieces of lamb meat to be totally immersed in the liquid.

Braising Lamb

Braising is a moist cooking method where lamb cuts are browned and involve the slow cooking of a lamb meat in liquid. The technique for braising ready cuts of lamb is also known as pot roasting. Braising tenderizes and softens firm or tough lamb cuts and allows for rich and subtle blending of the meat flavors with those of the liquid and seasonings. Braising is the perfect cooking method for tougher cuts

of lamb such as neck slices, lamb shoulder cuts, lamb riblets, lamb shanks, lamb flanks, lamb breasts and a wide variety of lamb dishes.

Braising is the preferred method for cooking tougher cuts of lamb.

Lamb cuts that are braised are always cooked until well done because moist heat cooking methods permeate the lamb meat with hot liquid and high temperatures, creating tender and flavorful meat. However, braised lamb dishes can be overcooked in spite of the moist heat cooking method.

Tender cuts from the lamb loin and lamb rib should always be reserved for dry heat cooking methods.

Stewing Lamb

Stewing Lamb is a moist cooking method where dishes are often prepared with tougher cuts of lamb that have been cut in small pieces. Also, stewing is a technique where small meat pieces are cooked gently in liquid to completely cover the meat and vegetables, if desired. There are many variations of lamb stew including recipes that are basically the same as beef stew except that lamb is used instead of beef. Other types of lamb stew include a variety of lamb dishes native to the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Many of the same lamb cuts that are suitable for braising are ideal as lamb stew meat.

Stewing tenderizes the lamb meat and allows the flavors of the ingredients to blend.

When stewing, cuts from the lamb shoulder and lamb flank are often used as well as other meat from the lamb.

Seasonings Suggestions for Lamb

Suggest easy marinades for lamb such as Italian salad dressing.

Lamb seasoning favorites include: garlic, oregano, basil, mint, thyme, rosemary, cumin. Lemon pepper and seasoned salt are especially easy seasonings for grilled lamb.

Insert quartered garlic cloves in lamb roasts before cooking

Soak favorite herbs or hickory chips in water and place on coals while grilling lamb.

Glaze lamb with fruit preserves the last 30 minutes of grilling or roasting.

Lamb works well with oriental sauces including sweet and sour.