

Moroccan spiced leg of lamb

This dish uses a vaguely Moroccan spice blend, which goes so well with lamb. It's definitely party food – buy a whole leg and then invite as many people as you think it will feed, plus a couple more. Thanks go to Patrick, Marketa, Megan, Kevin, Lindsay, Andrew and Carole, among others, for being such active lamb-fest participants.



Serves: approximately 10 (depending on sizes of leg, side dishes and tummies)

Preparation time: 20 mins (or a little more if you bone the leg yourself...)

Cooking time: 30 mins

1 leg of lamb, skinned, boned and butterflied open (see directions below)

4 green cardamom pods

2 black cardamom pods

1 tbsp cumin seeds

1 tsp coriander seeds

1 tsp fenugreek seeds

1 tsp fennel seeds

3 dried red chillies

2 bay leaves, torn into pieces

½ tsp ground cinnamon

1 tsp ground black pepper

4 fat cloves garlic, peeled

olive oil

grated zest of 2 lemons

salt

1. Get your butcher to skin, bone out and butterfly the leg of lamb for you. The idea is to end up with a large piece of meat of as even a thickness as possible – no part more than 2" thick. Or do it yourself (see below).
2. Remove seeds from cardamom pods and toast them along with the cumin, coriander, fenugreek, fennel and chillies in a small dry frying pan. It will only take a few minutes – they're ready when they start to smell great.
3. Grind the toasted spices up in an electric spice (/coffee bean) grinder or with a pestle and mortar along with all the other spices and the bay leaves.

4. Pound garlic with a pestle and mortar, or smash it to a pulp with the back of a knife. Using a little salt helps as it acts as an abrasive.
5. Mix garlic and spices in a bowl, along with enough olive oil to lubricate it into a loose paste. Zest lemons over the bowl (so as to catch the oils that are sprayed out) and stir to combine.
6. Around 6 hours before it's time to cook, season the meat on both sides with a good, even sprinkling of salt. Make sure the thicker areas get more salt than the thinner areas. Place lamb in a large container and rub the spice paste all over both sides. Store in the fridge, covered.
7. 1 hour before it's time to cook take lamb out of fridge to bring to room temperature. Get the grill ('BBQ') really hot, if you have one, or alternatively heat oven to 260C (500F) and find a rack you can fit over or in a large roasting dish/tray.
8. Grill/roast the lamb until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part reads 49C (120F), approximately 25 mins. The lamb should still feel a little springy to the touch. If it feels hard, you've over-cooked it. NB You should turn the meat over once or twice during cooking. Once done, place on a cutting board, loosely 'tent' with foil and let sit for 10 mins. During this time the juices and heat will distribute themselves and the internal temperature will rise by a few more degrees. (NB These instructions are for medium-rare meat, which is by far the nicest way to have lamb. If you want it more safely on the medium side, cook until the temperature reads 55C (130F).)
9. Slice the meat fairly thinly at an angle and across the grain. The grain direction will change periodically as the leg is made up of several different muscles, each with their own grain direction. Serve with pita bread, rice or couscous, some delicious sauces such as harissa and minty yoghurt, and a fresh salad of some sort. You will be in spicy lamb heaven.

How to butterfly a leg of lamb, roughly:

- First, slide your knife under the skin and trim it all off. Try not to puncture the flesh. You can remove thick bits of fat, but it's nice to leave a little.
- Cut round the irregularly shaped and annoying 'H bone' at the top (if the butcher hasn't already) and ease it out so the ball of the hip joint is exposed. Feel the shape of it with the tip of your knife and fingers and make lots of little cuts, always with your knife against the bone.
- Then, stabbing vertically downwards, incise a straight line from the ball down to the knee (on the *inside* of the leg). Your knife should hit the bone all the way along.



- Now carefully cut and scrape the meat away from the leg bone so that it is fully exposed. Slide your knife under it and release it from the meat all the way underneath, ending with the ball at the top, which should also be fully released from the meat.
- Now locate the kneecap and slide your knife between it and the knee joint. This helps release the flesh from around the knee.
- As before, cut a line through to the shin bone, from the knee to the ankle.
- Then release this bone as you did the top one. Finally you will find that you have removed all the bones!
- Open out the meat, trim off the kneecap and anything else you don't fancy eating, and make incisions along the thickest muscles so as to open out the meat and create an even thickness.
- If you want, weigh it – you should probably allow 170-225g (6-8 oz) per diner, depending on their appetites and the number of side dishes.