

# Spring brings the lamb

In the third of his monthly series on seasonal food, **DORY MASRI**, head chef at Norwich's popular Last Wine Bar, celebrates the ingredient that tells us spring – and Easter – is finally here: lamb.

Nothing says that spring is here more than the appearance of the first spring lamb in the butcher's shop. Of course, you can buy lamb all year round, whether from this country or the other side of the world, but you can't beat the tenderness of a genuine spring lamb.

Lamb has always been associated with springtime, both in a culinary and a symbolic sense. It is the traditional Easter Sunday dish, mainly because that festival falls right at the time when the lambs born in the winter is just ready for eating.

Why is spring lamb so good? Partly, it is because it has been reared outside in the cold, so it will have a good covering of fat, which when the meat is roasted in a relatively high heat, stops the meat drying out (a kind of self-basting mechanism). Also, young lamb is very tender, with a fine grain which you can see if you cut across the muscle.

The flavour of lamb meat is highly influenced by what it has eaten, whether that is wild herbs, heather or salt marshes – all adding to the flavour. A delicacy that you don't often see in this country is milk-fed lamb, which is extremely tender, although in my view does not have the flavour of an outdoor fed animal.

Strictly speaking, meat from a young sheep can be called lamb right up until it is one year old. After that it becomes a hogget, which is one step removed from the mature, stronger meat that is mutton. But we will concern ourselves with the young, tender spring lambs here.

My recipes today contain two very different methods of cooking lamb. For the shoulder, a long, slow cooking is recommended, so that the fat breaks down and the meat tenderises. Rack of lamb is the complete opposite. Because the muscle hasn't done much work, it is very



tender, so it can be cooked very quickly – after searing in a pan, just six to eight minutes. Don't be tempted to overcook the racks, to enjoy the tenderness they need to be nice and pink. The term spring lamb technically applies right through to the July 1; later spring lambs will have slightly darker meat, will be slightly less tender, but will probably have a bit more flavour – having spent longer outside munching on all those lovely natural flavourings.

■ Next month: asparagus

**LAST**  
Wine Bar & Restaurant

## What's In Season

■ **Vegetables:** Purple sprouting broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, morel mushrooms, wild garlic, radishes, rhubarb, carrots, kale, watercress, spinach, rosemary flowers

■ **Meat/fish:** Lamb, cockles

### A Warm Salad Of Lamb, Pomegranate, Spring Onion, Cucumber, Radishes And Caper Berries With A Sherry And Olive Oil Dressing

Serves 4

shoulder of lamb on the bone, weighing 2-3kg  
1 onion  
2 sticks of celery  
1 carrot  
1 leek  
25g parsley  
25g mint  
500ml red wine

For the salad  
cucumber, deseeded and sliced  
1 pomegranate deseeded  
6 spring onions, thinly sliced  
8 radishes, sliced  
a good handful of caper berries  
150ml sherry vinegar  
300ml extra virgin olive oil  
a few rocket leaves  
salt and pepper



■ Roughly chop the onion, celery, carrot and leek, and put on a tray. Add the stalks of the parsley and mint leaving a few sprigs for the salad.

■ Season the shoulder with salt and pepper and put it on top of the vegetables. Add the wine and 300 ml of water; cover with aluminium foil, and cook for three hours in a pre-heated oven at 150°C/300°F/gas mk. 2.

■ Pick the meat from the bone and shred it, putting it in a bowl.

■ Don't forget to leave some spare for today's other recipe.

■ Add all the salad ingredients, the sherry vinegar, olive oil, the mint and parsley sprigs. Season with salt and pepper and serve.

### Roasted Rack Of Lamb With Shoulder Of Lamb Spring Roll, And Sautéed Pok Choy. Served With Potato Dauphinoise

Serves 4

4 two- or three-rib pieces of rack of lamb (ask your butcher to cut and trim them)  
some shredded cooked lamb shoulder (see today's salad recipe for this)  
4 sheets of spring roll pastry  
3 spring onions  
a few sprigs of mint and parsley, roughly chopped  
500ml sunflower oil for frying  
salt and pepper  
4 large pok choy  
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

For the dauphinoise  
4 starchy potatoes (such as maris piper), sliced  
250ml double cream  
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
a few sprigs of thyme  
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mk. 4.

■ Bring the cream, thyme and garlic to simmering point in a pan, then season the mixture to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

■ Arrange the potato slices in an oven-proof gratin dish. Then add the hot cream. Bake for 50 minutes or until the potato slices are

cooked through (when a skewer can be inserted into them easily).

■ For the spring roll, you will need some shredded, cooked lamb shoulder – which you will have if you have also made today's other recipe! Mix in the spring onions, mint and parsley, and season with salt and pepper. Lay the pastry on a flat surface and brush the edges with water – this will help the pastry stick together when you roll it.

■ Put some of the lamb mix in the centre of the pastry, fold in the edges and roll. Heat up the sunflower oil and fry the spring roll until golden brown and crispy.

■ Now heat some oil in a pan and fry the racks of lamb, skin side down first until the fat is brown and crispy. Season, and finish in the oven for 6-8 minutes (depending how you liked it cooked). Rest for two further minutes.

■ Blanch the pok choy in boiling water for three minutes. Then sauté in olive oil. Season  
■ Arrange the rack on plate with pok choy and the spring roll. Serve with the dauphinoise on the side.



## Nibbles



■ Regional produce champions Produced in Norfolk is launching its first farmers' market at Wroxham Barns on Easter Saturday, from 10am to 2pm. The event, which will then take place on the second Saturday of every month, will feature some of the county's finest foods, including ice cream, butter and milk, venison, beef, pork pies and sausage rolls, honey and preserves, chutneys and pickles, spice kits, organic fruit and vegetables, homemade quiche and cup cakes plus a great range of cottage garden plants, herbs and lavender. Producers setting up stalls will include Nortons Dairy, Parravani's Ice Cream, Happy Hogs, Norfolk Berry Garden, Orchid Apiaries, Norfolk Finest Foods, Bhaji Man, Salle Organics, Houghton Hall Venison, Pat-a-Cake Bakery (pictured) and Jelly Cottage Plants. Ian Russell, director Wroxham Barns, said: "It is a development that is in tune with the way we run our business. We are passionate about good local produce and were proud to win East of England Tourism's 'Taste of England' award last year. Our restaurant menus feature local food whenever possible and we sell a wide range of local beers, wines and preserves at the Country Food Store." [www.producedinnorfolk.com](http://www.producedinnorfolk.com)

■ Something a bit different on Norwich Riverside this weekend as the centre's restaurants join forces to host a continental market featuring the chance to sample food. They will also be stalls selling everything from olives and cheese to fresh bread. The event is on today and tomorrow.

■ Mariners pub, on Howard Street South, Yarmouth, is hosting a three-day Cornish Beer Festival from next Friday. More than 20 Cornish beers will be on sale to help wash down Cornish pasties and scones with clotted cream. The Rose, in Queens Road, Norwich, will also launch its EasterFest on the same day.

■ Cream teas, cakes, unusual savouries and recipes inspired by the area's historic links to monks will be on the menu of



Maddermarket Tea Room, which has just opened its doors in an 18th century building in St John Maddermarket, Norwich. The team behind the venture are determined to bring an eclectic array of flavours, smells and colours to their fare, which will include a lunch menu including dishes like spiritual cod, meat loaf, crab lasagne, seafood curry and Brazilian moqueca. Savouries will include green eggs, meat croquette, cod pasty and rissoles. They also hope to build community links with a special lounge where art students can display their works, allowing community groups to host events for free and welcoming classical music students to play every Saturday afternoon.

■ Lakenham Creamery is in full swing for the Easter holidays. This summer's range of flavours includes New York coffee, mango Alphonse, raspberry ripple and apricot and brandy. Meanwhile Ronaldo's Ices are equally busy producing more than 30 flavours including this year damson, banana choc chip and chocolate and chilli.

■ Food, restaurant and pub news can be emailed to [goingout@archant.co.uk](mailto:goingout@archant.co.uk)