



Winedog Speaks

The Other Easter Meat – Roasted Lamb

I always catch some grief from my youngest son and my wife when I mention cooking lamb. The complaint is of the same type as my ventures into preparing venison. “How can you think of cooking something that adorable?” Thank you, Walt Disney.

I’m not going to go there. I’ll simply point out that lamb is a wonderful source of healthy, flavorful protein and it has been a centerpiece of fine dining all the way back to Biblical times. It is said to have been served at the Last Supper and, frankly, that’s good enough for me.

For years, I’ve touted the wonderful flavors of the area of France known as Provence and the use of a special blend of wild herbs indigenous to that area and common in many of the dishes produced by Provençal cooks. The combination of marjoram, thyme, savory, basil, rosemary, sage and fennel seed offer a taste and fragrance that I find irresistible.

Herbs de Provence are readily available to all of us in the spice section of most supermarkets and one whiff of the heady fragrance of the blend and I’m sure you will join me as a fan of the flavors of Provence.

I have prepared a special dinner for my church the last couple of years as part of a Good Friday gathering and featured roast Leg of Lamb Provençal both years. Many of my friends at church had never enjoyed lamb before but now feel as I do...that it’s simply too good to ignore.

Here’s how I will be preparing Leg of Lamb this year and I hope you’ll become a tad adventurous and give it a try.

Roasted Lamb Provençal (Serves 6)

1 (6 or 7 lb.) boneless or semi-boneless Leg of Lamb
8 garlic cloves
¾ cup Herbs de Provence
½ cup EV Olive Oil
Fresh Ground Black Pepper
Sea Salt

Pat your lamb with paper towels and remove all but ¼-inch of fat from surface if necessary. Take your olive oil and rub the entire surface until you have an even coating of oil. Using a



small knife, cut tiny slits into the surface of the meat and press slivers of your garlic directly into the openings you've created until you have all of your garlic evenly distributed throughout your Leg of Lamb.

Distribute your herbs over the entire roast and rub them in with your hands. Salt and pepper the lamb to taste and tie closed if you have a boneless leg that has been split. Place your remote meat thermometer into the thickest part of your lamb being sure it is not touching bone.

While letting your roast stand preheat your oven to 425°F and prepare your roasting pan with a rack or aluminum foil tightly rolled into a pencil thin strand and zigzagged into the bottom of your roasting pan.

Place your lamb into the roasting pan and situate your pan onto an oven rack set in the lower third of your oven. Allow to cook at your higher temperature for 20 minutes then reset your temperature to 350°F and continue to roast until the probe registers 135°F, about 1 ¾ hours.

Transfer your Leg of Lamb to a cutting board and allow to stand 15 to 25 minutes. The internal temperature will continue to rise to about 145°F or medium. Slice the meat just before serving against the grain and present it with warmed pita bread slices.

The wines of southern France come in a wide variety of styles but I remain hopelessly attracted to what are called country wines in that area or Vin de Pays. These are offered with the grape varietal listed on the label, much like wines coming out of California, and typically are soft, fruity and very flavorful.

With your highly aromatic Leg of Lamb Provençal, the best grapes I've discovered include Carignan, Syrah, Pinot Noir and Grenache. The wines may be 100% of a single grape or often a blend of two or more red grapes. There are many wonderful producers of Vin de Pays, but some of my favorites are Mommessin, Jean-Claude Boisset and Louis Bernard.

If your preferences are running to domestic red wines, I might recommend a rich Syrah or Pinot Noir from California or the Pacific Northwest. If you are thinking California, the Pinot Noir coming from the Russian River area or listed as Carneros fruit are normally great choices. It all begins with top quality fruit and the micro climates of both are perfect for Pinot Noir.

I hope you'll make a point of something special for a Good Friday dinner or Easter Sunday. There's something extraordinary about gathering your friends and loved ones around you through the Easter holiday. It may not seem so right this moment, but Spring is just about here and somewhere under all that snow is a bunch of Tulips and Easter Lillies making ready for their show. Just thought I'd mention that. Cheers!

Allison, a native of Warren County in Southwestern Ohio, has been in the fine wine and fine dining field for 31 years in the South Florida, Chicago and Southwestern Ohio markets. He writes a weekly syndicated column, manages a fine wine business and is the executive chef for Winedog Fine Wines and Catering Services. You can visit his column archive at www.winedog.com and take your comments and questions directly to him at 888-288-0668 or email him at winedog@winedog.com. He has resided with his wife and two sons since 1999 in the country outside of Morrow, Ohio

