

Braised Lamb Shoulder with Buttered Spinach, Yogurt Sauce & Pine Nuts

Serves 6

Accompany with boiled or roasted potatoes or bulgur pilaf.

3 to 3½-pound boneless lamb shoulder roast
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 cup dry white wine
1 six-inch sprig fresh rosemary
2 bay leaves
2 dozen small white boiling onions, about ½ ounce each
3 tablespoons pine nuts
2 tablespoons butter
1 pound baby spinach leaves
¾ cup plain yogurt, preferably whole milk, at room temperature
1½ tablespoons chopped fresh dill

Instructions: If the roast is encased in string netting or otherwise tied by the butcher, remove it from the netting or untie it and lay it open flat so you can season the inside. Trim away obvious clumps of fat or tough tendon and most of the fat cap on the outside; leaving a little fat is OK. Season the meat on both sides with salt, using about 2 teaspoons, and with black pepper. Sprinkle the sliced garlic evenly over the inside, then reroll the roast and retie it or return it to the net bag.

Heat the olive oil in a large heavy pot or Dutch oven over moderate heat. Brown the meat well on all sides, taking care not to burn it. Browning will take about 20 minutes. Transfer the meat with tongs to a platter and pour off any fat in the pot. Return the pot to moderate heat and add the wine, rosemary and bay leaves. Bring to a simmer, then return the meat to the pot. Cover and adjust the heat to maintain a steady, gentle simmer.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Prepare a large bowl of ice water. Add the onions to the boiling water and boil for about 1 minute. Drain and transfer immediately to the ice water to stop the cooking. When cool, drain again. Cut off the stem end of each onion and remove the papery outer skin, leaving the hairy root end intact; the skin should peel off easily. Trim the root end closely but don't cut it away; it helps hold the onion layers together.

Preheat an oven to 325°. Toast the pine nuts until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Set aside to cool.

After the meat has simmered for 1½ hours, uncover and baste with some of the pan juices. Add the onions, re-cover and continue simmering until the lamb and onions are tender when pierced.

more, basting the meat occasionally with pan juices.

Transfer the meat to a cutting board to rest for 10 to 15 minutes. Remove the bay leaves and the rosemary sprig from the sauce.

In a large skillet, melt the butter over moderate heat. Add the spinach a few handfuls at a time, tossing with tongs until it wilts just enough to add more. When all the spinach is barely wilted, season with salt and reduce the heat to low.

Simmer the lamb pan juices and onions over moderately high heat until they thicken to a pleasing sauce consistency. Reduce heat to low while you carve the meat.

In a bowl, whisk together the yogurt and dill. Whisk in 2 to 3 tablespoons of the reduced meat juices to flavor the yogurt; if the yogurt still seems a little thick, thin with water. Season with salt and pepper.

Untie the meat and slice about ¼-inch thick. Transfer the slices to individual dinner plates. Spoon the onions and sauce over the meat. Divide the spinach among the dinner plates. Spoon yogurt sauce over the spinach and top with toasted pine nuts. Serve immediately.

Per serving: 640 calories, 46 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 43 g fat (20 g saturated), 180 mg cholesterol, 197 mg sodium, 3 g fiber.



Wine pairing: It is fairly easy to pair a wine with the lamb on its own; many medium- to full-bodied dry red wines will fill the bill. Adding sweet onions and vegetal spinach narrows the choice. Try relatively soft, low-tannin reds like Merlot, Beaujolais, Spanish Garnacha and Southern Rhone red. Also good are Chinon and Bourgueil Cabernet Franc. If you want a white, try a full-bodied Alsatian Pinot Gris.



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