

SLOW-ROASTED LAMB WITH CUMIN

Serves 10 to 12

By Dennis W. Viau; modified from a recipe
in a Moroccan cookbook

This roasted leg of lamb has an exotic flavor, being seasoned primarily with cumin. The flavor is lighter than beef chili, but the spice is evident. Lamb has a bold flavor anyway; so adding cumin and garlic, along with other spices, complements the meat well.



Ingredients:

5 to 6-pound (2.25 to 2.75kg) leg of lamb, with or without bone (I prefer boneless)
2 ounces (70g) butter; softened, at room temperature
3 cloves garlic; minced or crushed through a garlic press
2 teaspoons ground cumin
3 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon salt
white wine, as needed for basting (see below)

For garnish at the table, combine:

1 tablespoon ground cumin
1½ teaspoons salt

Directions:

Pierce the leg all over with a small knife or cut shallow slits across the leg in a checkerboard pattern, just cutting through the fatty rind to the meat.

Combine butter, garlic, cumin, coriander, paprika, and ½ teaspoon salt to make a paste. Rub the meat well with the spice mixture. If using a boneless leg of lamb, open the leg and rub a small amount of the spice on the inside as well; then tie the leg into a roast again.

Heat the oven to 425°F (220°C) with a rack in the upper portion, but leaving enough room for the roast.

Place the leg, rind side up, in a deep roasting pan and roast on the upper rack of the oven for 10 minutes. Baste with the juices, if any, and remove the upper rack (or move to a center position). Reduce the oven to 325°F (160°C) and place the roast on the center rack. Roast for 3¼ hours, basting every 20 to 30 minutes. I find that this roast does not yield juices for basting; so I add about ¼ to ½ cup of white wine initially, then add more periodically, as needed, to have juices in the bottom of the roasting pan.

For a really tender leg of lamb, reduce the oven to 250°F (120/130°C) and bake for 7 to 8 hours. The meat will be tender enough to separate with your fingers, which is one traditional way of eating it.

When done, remove from the oven and let rest 15 minutes before carving. Carve at the table. Combine the garnish ingredients and place on the table for guests to add to their meat, if desired.

The **Step By Step** guide begins on the following page.

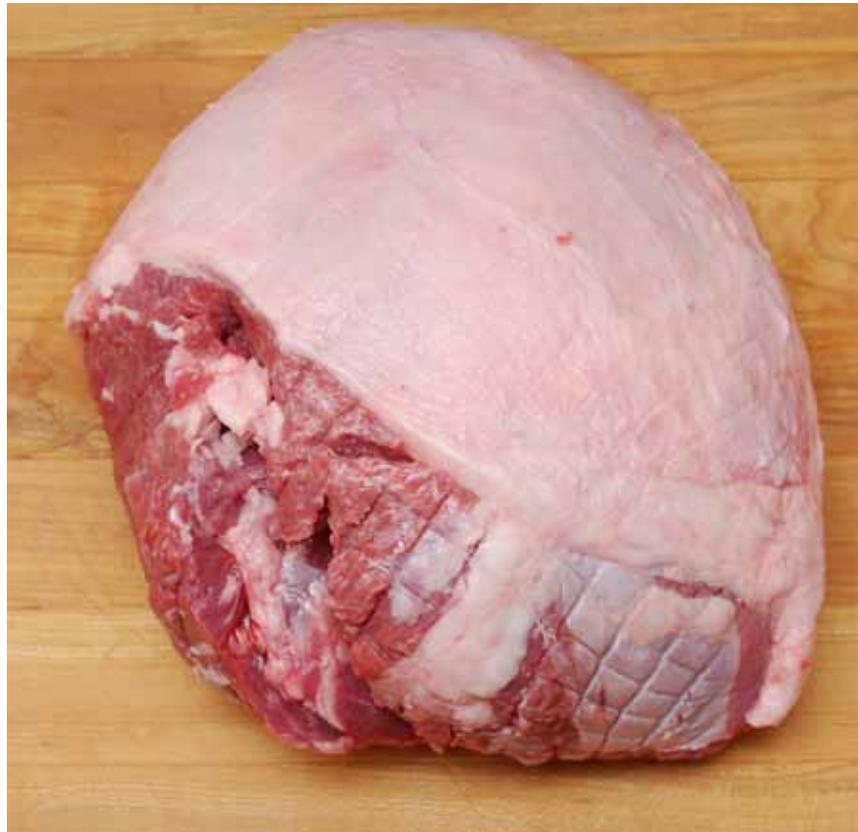
STEP-BY-STEP

1



The ingredients for this rather exotic recipe are simple and easily available. I buy the boneless leg of lamb at the warehouse store. The leg comes with an elastic net holding it in shape. I remove the netting and tie the roast later, after I've seasoned it.

2



Normally I remove the fatty rind when I flavor the meat, such as for my Pesto Lamb. For this roast I am leaving the rind in place. See below for how I score it.

3

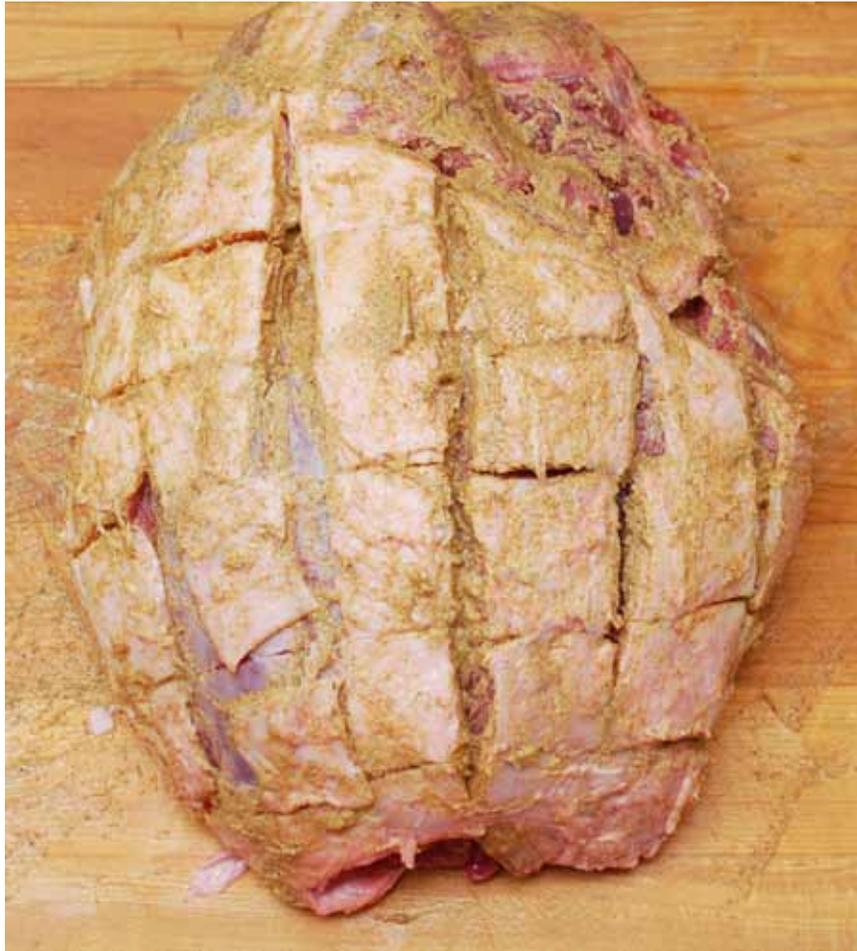
Assemble the 6 rub ingredients in a bowl and mix well.

4

With a thin, sharp knife, cut through the rind and barely into the meat. This will allow the rub flavors to permeate the meat. It will also help the rind to render and release its fat.

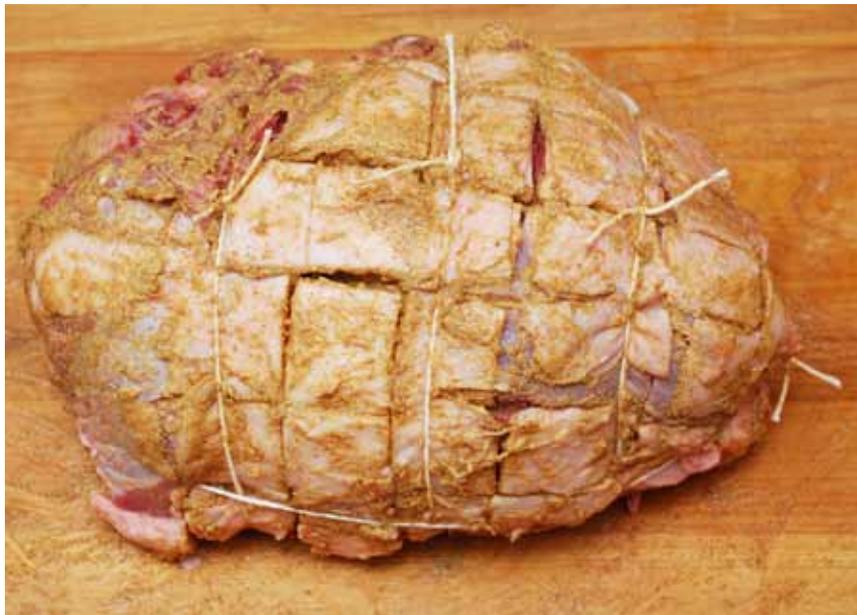
Start heating your oven to 425°F (220°C).

5



If you are using a boneless leg of lamb, open it and spread a little of the rub on the meat inside. Then roll the roast into shape again and spread the rub ingredients all over the meat and rind, pushing it into the grooves cut through the rind.

6



Finally, tie the roast with kitchen twine so that it will cook evenly. Place in a deep roasting pan and add about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of white wine to the pan. Bake on an upper rack at 425°F (220°C) for 10 minutes. Then lower the temperature to 325°F (160°C) and move the rack to the center of the oven. Continue baking for $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours, basting every 15 to 20 minutes.

7



Here's a trick if you have a glass baster like I have. You don't want to suck up hot pan juices with a cold glass baster. The thermal shock could crack the glass. Put cold water in a sauce pan and place your baster in the water, squeezing the bulb to fill it with some water. Heat to boiling over medium heat and then reduce the heat to low. I use a wooden spoon to hold the plastic baster bulb away from the metal pan; otherwise, the hot pan might melt or damage it. Now you can safely baste with hot juices. Keep the baster in the hot water between uses.

8



After nearly 4 hours in the oven, the lamb has a dark and crisp crust. If you roast it at a lower temperature for a longer period of time, the crust will not be as dark, but the meat will be more tender.



Supposedly, a traditional way of eating this lamb is to cut thick chunks and let your dinner guests slice the meat thinly on their plate. I love to eat lamb with roasted vegetables, in this case butternut squash and yams.

Conclusion

For the amount of spices used in this rub, this lamb is surprisingly light. There is only a hint of the cumin, mostly along the edges where the rub was applied. Moroccans slow roast this lamb all day, 7 to 8 hours, at a low temperature until it is so tender they can pull it apart easily with their fingers. I tried roasting it that way as well and it is just a delicious, but more tender. It is especially welcome in winter when it would feel good to have a warm oven on all day.