

STUFFED LAMB CHOPS

Serves 6.

By Dennis W. Viau; one of my own creations.

These lamb chops have a stronger, bolder flavor than leg of lamb. Therefore, they benefit from being paired with stuffing that has plenty of flavor. I also like to eat these with roasted vegetables, which I think complements the flavor of the lamb well.



Ingredients:

6 lamb chops, 1 to 2 inches (2.5 to 5cm) thick
2 tablespoons oil for frying, more as needed
½ cup (3 ounces/85g) wild rice
2 cups (475ml) chicken stock; homemade, if available
1 medium onion (6 ounces/170g); chopped
Optional: 1 anchovy fillet
8 to 10 shiitake mushrooms (2 ounces/57g); stems removed (save) and then chopped
6 to 8 olives; pitted and finely chopped
½ tablespoon capers; rinsed and drained
1½ cups (150g) bread crumbs
1 tablespoon fresh Italian parsley; finely chopped
¼ cup (1 ounce/38g) Gruyère cheese; grated
3 to 4 fresh sage leaves; chopped, or ¼ teaspoon ground sage
Salt and pepper to taste
½ to ¾ cup (118 to 177ml) red or white wine

Directions:

The wild rice will take the longest to cook, so start it first. Bring 1½ cups chicken stock to a boil in a saucepan. Add the rice, reduce the heat to low, and simmer 40 to 45 minutes until tender. Do not drain. Set aside to cool.

While the rice is cooking, heat the oil in a skillet over medium-high heat and brown the chops on both sides, about 4 minutes per side. Remove from the skillet and set aside to cool.

Place the chopped onions with the optional anchovy in the skillet (using the same oil) and sauté until the onions are tender and translucent, about 5 minutes. Remove from the pan.

Sauté the chopped mushrooms, adding more oil (or butter) if needed, until tender, about 2 to 3 minutes.

Combine the rice, including the liquid, with the onions, mushrooms, olives, and capers. Mix well. Add the bread crumbs and parsley. Mix together, adding the remaining ½ cup stock if needed for moisture. Add the Gruyère and sage. Mix. Adjust for salt and pepper. Heat oven to 375°F (190°C).

Cut a deep pocket in each chop, cutting from one meaty edge inward to the bone. Place about 1 rounded tablespoon of filling in the pocket of each chop. Put the remaining stuffing in a separate baking dish. Arrange the chops in a baking pan. (The shiitake stems can be placed in the bottom of the pan for flavor.) Pour ½ to ¾ cup (118 to 177ml) wine in the pan. Roast, uncovered, to an internal temperature of 135 to 140°F (57 to 60°C), about 25 minutes. The additional stuffing can be baked at the same time.

Let rest at least 5 minutes before serving. Strain the pan juices for garnish or to make gravy.

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

STEP-BY-STEP

1



Assemble your ingredients (your *mise en place*). I prefer shiitake mushrooms, but if you prefer portobello (which are only fully grown cremino mushrooms—those white button baby mushrooms sold in the produce section), feel free to substitute. I am using homemade chicken stock because I make a lot of it, but feel free to substitute with the store-bought variety if you want. A large onion is shown here. I couldn't find a medium-sized one. So I used only half.

2



Wild rice takes 40 to 45 minutes to cook, so start it first. Put about 1½ cups (355ml) chicken stock in a saucepan and bring the stock to boiling. Add the rice, return to the boil, cover, reduce the heat to low, and simmer until done. When cooked, do not drain or discard the liquid. You'll use it in the stuffing.

3

Pour the oil into a skillet and heat. Arrange the chops in the skillet and brown on both sides, about 4 minutes per side.

4

This step just sears them. Note: You can do this step in advance, but store them wrapped in the refrigerator if you don't plan to use them right away. The meat is still raw on the inside. Bacteria would grow if left at room temperature for hours.

5



When I take the chops out of the pan I use the same polystyrene tray they were in when purchased, but I line the tray with foil to protect the meat from raw meat juices. This precaution is not really necessary because these chops will be baked to a safe temperature in the oven, but it doesn't hurt to be overly cautious. Set aside to cool.

6



Using the same skillet and oil in which the chops were browned, sauté the chopped onion until tender, about 5 minutes. If these look a little browned, it's the flavorful fond left in the pan from browning the meat. After the onions are cooked, transfer them to a bowl and set aside to cool.

7



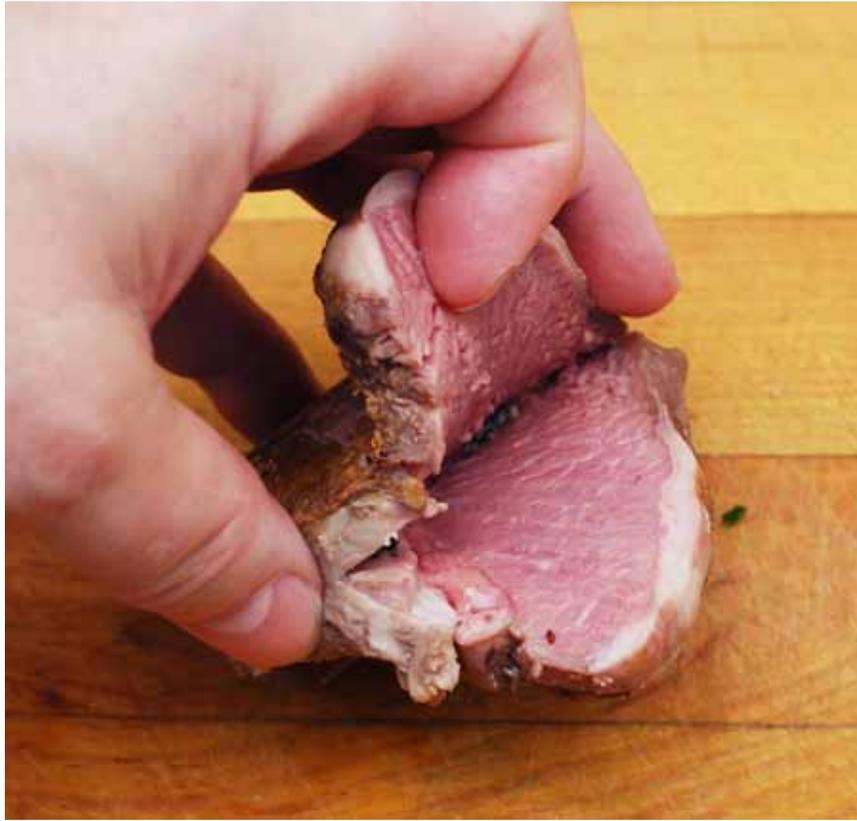
Finally, sauté the chopped mushrooms. They are like little sponges and will absorb all the oil. Add a little more oil or butter to the pan if necessary. The mushrooms cook in only about 2 or 3 minutes.

8



Combine all the stuffing ingredients. The reason for the “set aside and cool” instructions above is to avoid melting the Gruyère cheese, which might become stringy if combined with hot ingredients.

9



You also want the meat cool enough to handle safely for this step. Using a very sharp knife, cut a deep pocket into each chop by inserting the knife at the edge and cutting in toward the bone.

10



You won't fit a lot of stuffing into the pocket. A well rounded tablespoon will be enough.

11



You'll have plenty of stuffing left over. You can never have too much stuffing. Put the extra stuffing in a baking dish and bake it with the chops, either covered or uncovered.

12



Arrange the stuffed chops in a baking pan. I put the stems from the mushrooms in the bottom of the pan first. Add about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (118 to 177ml) of either white or red wine and bake the chops at 375°F (190°C) until they reach an internal temperature of about 135°F (57°C). In my oven this takes 25 to 30 minutes, depending on how thick the chops are.

13

When done, remove from the oven and let rest about 5 minutes before serving. The internal temperature will rise a few more degrees. The resting stage also allows the juices to distribute more evenly.

14

My favorite way to eat lamb is with oven-roasted vegetables. These are chopped potatoes, butternut squash, and yams. Serve with additional stuffing on the side. You can strain the pan juices for garnish.

Conclusion

These chops are not difficult to prepare. The lamb, however, can be a little expensive. These seven chops were 2 pounds (907g) and they cost \$18.00. For feeding 6 to 7 people, that price isn't prohibitive. Nonetheless, I would consider this meal appropriate for a special occasion or Sunday meal.