

Spring lamb and grasshopper pie

by Lydia Lovell

From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

Every year about this time Uncle Henry began throwing out a few hints that he thought we should have a leg of lamb for Sunday dinner. Uncle Henry liked spring lamb as well as, if not better than, roast beef, and Aunt Olivia, always ready to please him if she could, was quick to respond.

First to be done after she brought home a leg of lamb was the chore of trimming off as much fat as possible. This required patience and a sharp knife. Sometimes Uncle Henry trimmed while Aunt Olivia prepared vegetables she cooked with the meat to flavor the gravy. Another chore on Sunday morning was making a hot fire in the stove so the meat was seared and juices sealed in during the first 20 minutes of cooking. A sure sign of spring was **Roast Leg of Lamb** on Sunday.

5-6 lb. leg of lamb, trimmed 2 onions, sliced thin
1 garlic clove, cut in slices 2 carrots, sliced thin
3 T. vegetable oil 1-1/2 C. beef stock
2 T. salt (or chicken stock)
2 T. flour 1/2 t. lemon juice

To insure a hot oven, preheat to 500°. Cut 6 or 8 incisions about 1/4" deep and as wide, in fatty side of lamb leg. Tuck slices of garlic into cuts. Brush leg with vegetable oil. Combine salt and flour and rub over surface of meat. Place roast on rack in pan, fat side up. Roast, uncovered, for 20 minutes; then reduce heat to 375° and scatter sliced vegetables around the rack. Return meat to oven and roast another 40 minutes. When done, transfer roast to a heated platter. Let rest at least 10 minutes before serving.

Meanwhile, skim any fat from the pan, add stock, and boil briskly on top burner for 5 or 6 minutes, scraping browned-on bits into sauce. Taste for flavor, adding salt and pepper if needed. Strain through a fine sieve into a saucepan, pressing down hard on vegetables before discarding them. Remove any remaining fat. Add lemon juice and reheat. Serve mashed potatoes with lamb and pass the gravy.

No vegetable is a better accompaniment to lamb than fresh asparagus. Aunt Olivia belonged to the "don't-overcook-green-vegetables school." That didn't mean she expected us to eat them half-raw, but neither were they boiled to mush. When Aunt Olivia's asparagus spears arrived at the table, they were tender enough to cut with a fork, but still firm enough to have some consistency and had retained their green color. This is how she achieved it. Since asparagus is apt to be sandy, her first step was to wash the spears in cool running water, scrubbing them with a brush hard enough to remove the sand but gently enough not to bruise stalks or buds. Like other good shoppers, of course, to assure tenderness she chose spears with closed buds, those which had not yet begun to flower. Aunt Olivia then bent each stalk, near the base where the color started to fade from green to ivory. Each one snapped at the proper point to eliminate the woody end.

In a 10" skillet, she poured half-a-cup of boiling water, added a pinch of salt, laid the asparagus spears in the water, clapped on the cover, and brought the water to boiling again over high heat. As soon as the water boiled, she turned the heat to low, set her timer for 10 minutes, and tipped the cover ever so slightly to allow steam to escape. When the timer rang, she turned off the heat, leaving the asparagus to



finish cooking while she served the rest of the meal. Finally, she removed the spears from the pan with tongs, laying five or six on each plate and topping them with dabs of butter.

If you gave up eating cucumbers during winter months because those available were tasteless shrivelled waxed ones, keep your eye peeled for fresh little pickling cukes in the market. These are far superior in flavor to their more attractive-looking big brothers and their seeds are small and sweet. Use them as soon as you buy them, however, for they won't keep well. **Cucumber Salad** made with pickling cukes is another spring treat in the Lovell household.

4-6 pickling cucumbers 1/2 large sweet onion,
2 T. salt sliced thin
3 T. vegetable oil 1 t. sugar
1 T. tarragon vinegar shake or two of black pepper

Peel cukes and slice thinly into a deep bowl. Mix with 2 T. salt. Set a saucer over cucumbers and weight it down with a heavy jar. Refrigerate at least two hours or overnight. Press saucer against cukes while tipping the bowl over the sink to drain as much liquid as possible. Then add other ingredients and mix well. Return to refrigerator for another hour. Serve with joy... eat with gusto.

Spinach comes up early, one of the first spring garden crops. Not everyone counts spinach among their favorite vegetables, however. If you'd like to serve a special bread with the season's first leg of lamb, **Spinach Corn Bread** is a grand way to introduce this green in a form which is acceptable to everybody.

1 16-oz. pkg. fresh spinach 1/2 t. baking soda
3 strips bacon, fried crisp 3/4 C. yellow corn meal
1/4 C. bacon drippings 2 eggs, beaten
2 t. baking powder 1 C. buttermilk
1 t. salt 1/2 C. cheddar cheese, grated

Wash spinach and chop coarsely. In a large bowl, combine all dry ingredients and set aside. In a medium bowl, mix beaten eggs, buttermilk and chopped spinach. (Frozen chopped spinach may be used, thawed and pressed in a sieve to eliminate juice.) Crumble in bacon and add enough vegetable oil to bacon drippings to equal 1/4 C. Mix well, then stir into dry ingredients, mixing only until just moistened. Butter and flour a 9"x9" baking pan. Fill with batter. Sprinkle cheese on top and bake in 375° oven for 25 minutes.

Traditionally, after hearty Sunday dinners, adult menfolk in the Lovell family settled back in their easy chairs and took short snoozes while the womenfolk tended to things in the kitchen. In today's world of "share and share alike," the male prerogative to nap while females toil has been abrogated, but none of us, at that time, gave it a second thought. Perhaps one reason the men needed their naps was that they had over-indulged in one of Aunt Olivia's rich desserts. Such could have been the case whenever she prepared **Grasshopper Pie**. First she made a chocolate crumb pie shell. You may do it this way, or buy one ready-made.

1 1/4 C. chocolate wafer crumbs 1/3 C. melted butter
1/4 C. sugar (or margarine)

In a small bowl mix crumbs, sugar, and shortening thoroughly. Press into bottom and sides of a 9" pie plate. Bake at 400° for 5 minutes. Cool completely before filling with:

1 env. unflavored gelatin 3 egg yolks
1/4 C. sugar 1/4 C. white creme de cacao
1/2 C. cold water 1/4 C. green creme de menthe

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Whites of 3 eggs 1 C. heavy cream, whipped
1/4 C. sugar

In the top of a double boiler, combine gelatin, sugar, and water. Stir in one egg yolk at a time, blending thoroughly. Place over boiling water. Cook, stirring, until mixture thickens slightly, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in liqueurs. Refrigerate, stirring occasionally, until mixture is consistency of unbeaten egg whites. Beat egg whites until stiff but not dry. Gradually add sugar and beat until very stiff. Fold together with gelatin mixture and whipped cream. Pour into chocolate shell. Chill two hours or overnight. Garnish with shaved chocolate.

If you serve this pie to your husband after a big Sunday dinner, be prepared to have him fall asleep while you do the dishes.

Bon appetit.