

Easter Feast from the Farmstead

SIMPLE INGREDIENTS FOR AN ELEGANT YET RUSTIC HOLIDAY MEAL

Courtney H. Diener-Stokes



True North Farmstead



True North Farmstead's sheep's milk cheese made on site



Megan Bogle, co-owner of True North Farmstead



IF YOU'RE HOSTING EASTER dinner this year on April 20th, you'll want something special on the menu. For some, that's a glazed ham. But for many, Easter, spring and renewal all mean it's time to cook lamb. To find where to source locally grown lamb, we talked with owners of a family-run sheep farm in Downingtown.

Megan and Brian Bogle, co-owners of **True North Farmstead**, cook simple main dishes for their family of five, whether it's a daily meal or for the Easter holiday. "If you have good, quality ingredients, you don't have to do much to them," Megan said. "All you have to do is salt and pepper the food, and cook it right."

Their sheep and dairy farm focuses on milk- and grass-fed spring lamb along with farmstead sheep's milk cheese and yogurt made on site. These ingredients are the basis of delicacies like a roasted leg of lamb that Megan tops with a classic French demi-glace. "We harvest our lambs at three to four months of age, so it's a tender lamb with a clean and mild taste," she said.

Megan pairs her moist, roasted lamb with favorite side dishes — classic French fondant potatoes, along with roasted Brussels sprouts or broccoli. Brian was initially drawn to the peasant style of French cooking after experimenting with Julia Child's approachable way of cooking classic cuisine.

The Bogles' special meals often begin with a cheese appetizer of whipped brebis cheese, made using their soft, spreadable sheep's milk cheese, served with sliced baguette. "You can top it with olive oil, or if you want something sweet, use honey or jam."

Their lamb meat, offered seasonally and in a variety of cuts, inspires Megan to make lamb stew if she has a lamb shoulder to cook — an ideal cut for slow-cooked stews since it's a tougher meat. This dish makes a hearty and warming meal on those occasional still-chilly April days.

For everyday meals, the Bogles use ground lamb, with its mellow and mild flavor, as a substitute for ground beef in family-friendly meals. They'll use ground lamb for Bolognese sauce over pasta or to make hamburgers (lamb burgers?).

As farm owners for over a decade, the Bogles are proud to offer quality ingredients to the community. Since each of their eight East Friesian/Lacuane mix ewes produces about two lambs each spring, the meat is in high demand and is sold quickly once it's processed. "I like knowing how the lambs were raised, and we can provide that information for people," said Megan.

Read on for a short course on the most desirable lamb cuts and some tasty recipes from True North Farmstead to inspire your Easter holiday meal!

Roasted Leg of Lamb

This dish depends on the delicious flavor of grass- and milk-fed lamb, so just a few additional ingredients are needed to bring out the best of this prized cut.



Serves 3 to 6 (approx. 1 lb. per person)

- 1 bone-in leg of lamb, 3 to 6 lbs.
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled
- 6 fresh rosemary sprigs
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 325°. Cut slits evenly spaced around the leg of lamb (about 6 slits). Stuff a garlic clove and some rosemary into each slit. Drizzle olive oil, salt and pepper over lamb and place remaining rosemary sprigs on top. Place in preheated oven. Roast until reddish-pink and juicy in the center for medium-rare (meat thermometer reading of 130°), about 20 to 22 minutes per pound. Remove from oven and rest, covered with foil, before carving. Serve with pan sauce or demi-glace (recipe below).

Classic French Demi-Glace

A demi-glace is a rich brown sauce in French cuisine, made with equal parts beef stock and espagnole (a classic reduced stock base). While it can be time-consuming to make, most prep is hands-off and can be done ahead of time. Homemade beef stock works best in this recipe because it creates a richer flavor to complement the lamb.

Serves up to 6 as gravy

For the espagnole:

- 1 bay leaf
- 3 to 4 fresh thyme sprigs
- 3 to 4 fresh parsley stems
- 7 to 8 whole black peppercorns



- 2 T. butter
- ½ C. onion, diced
- ¼ C. carrot, diced
- ¼ C. celery, diced
- 2 T. all-purpose flour
- 3 C. beef stock (preferably homemade)
- 2 T. tomato puree

For the Demi-Glace:

- 1 bay leaf
- 3 to 4 fresh thyme sprigs
- 3 to 4 parsley stems
- 7 to 8 whole black peppercorns
- 2 C. beef stock
- 2 C. espagnole sauce

To make the espagnole:

Place the bay leaf, thyme, parsley and peppercorns in a small piece of cheesecloth. Gather the edges to form a pouch and tie with a piece of kitchen twine.

In a heavy-duty medium saucepan, melt butter over medium heat until it becomes frothy.

Add the onions, carrots and celery. Saute until lightly browned, about 6 minutes.

Stir in the flour, a little bit at a time, until it's fully incorporated and forms a thick paste (roux).

Lower the heat to low and cook until the roux begins to brown, about 4 to 5 minutes.

Slowly whisk in the beef stock and tomato puree, making sure it's free of lumps. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to maintain a simmer. Add the herb sachet.

Simmer until the total volume has reduced by a third (you'll have 2 cups left), stirring frequently, about 35 to 45 minutes. Remove the sauce from heat and discard the herb sachet.

Pour the sauce through a wire mesh strainer lined with a piece of cheesecloth into a larger bowl. Discard the vegetables.

The espagnole can be kept covered and warm until ready to use. Or cool it down completely and refrigerate in a covered container for up to 5 days.

To make the demi-glace:

Place the bay leaf, thyme, parsley and peppercorns in a small piece of cheesecloth. Gather the edges to form a pouch and tie with a piece of kitchen twine.

Combine the beef stock and the espagnole sauce in a heavy-bottomed saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then lower to maintain a simmer.

Add the herb sachet and reduce the liquid by half, about 45 minutes. Remove from heat and discard the herb sachet.

Pour the sauce through a wire mesh strainer lined with a piece of cheesecloth into a larger bowl. Season with salt and pepper and serve as a gravy with your roasted leg of lamb (see recipe above).

Potatoes Fondant

This fancy French potato side dish — meaning melting potatoes — has crispy edges and a creamy center. It's sure to impress your lunch or dinner guests at your Easter meal.



Serves 4

- 2½ lbs. Yukon Gold potatoes, about 2½ to 3 inches long, peeled
- 2 T. extra virgin olive oil or beef fat
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 T. unsalted butter (1 T. reserved for sauce)
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 1 T. fresh thyme leaves
- 1½ C. chicken or beef stock (or vegetable broth)
- Flaky sea salt, such as Maldon, for finishing (optional)

Adjust oven rack to middle position and preheat oven to 450°. Cut off ends of potatoes to make them flat, then halve the potatoes crosswise to create disks. Pat dry with paper towels. In a 12-inch stainless steel straight-sided saute pan (or cast iron skillet), heat oil or fat over medium-high heat until just beginning to smoke.

Season potatoes with salt and pepper. Add to skillet, flat side down, in a single layer with space between each piece.

Cook, without moving, until potatoes begin to brown around edges, 4 to 5 minutes. Continue cooking while gently rotating and swirling the fat or oil in the pan to promote even browning and prevent sticking. Continue until potatoes are deeply browned on the bottom sides, cooking 3 to 4 minutes longer, adjusting heat as needed.

Flip potatoes onto the second flat side. Add butter and cook, swirling pan constantly, until butter is melted and begins to foam, about 1 minute.

Add garlic and thyme, and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Add stock and bring to a boil.

Transfer skillet to preheated oven and roast until potatoes are completely tender (offering little to no resistance when poked with a paring knife and liquid is reduced to a saucy consistency), 25 to 30 minutes.

Return skillet to the stove top. Using a thin metal spatula or tongs, transfer potatoes to a serving platter, leaving sauce in the skillet; discard garlic.

Bring sauce to a simmer over medium heat and cook, swirling pan and stirring constantly, until sauce is emulsified, about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Take off heat. Add in an additional tablespoon of butter until desired consistency is reached.

Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour some sauce over potatoes and pour the rest into a bowl to serve alongside potatoes.

Sprinkle potatoes with flaky sea salt and serve.

Whipped Brebis

This appetizer features Cosmos, one of True North's five types of sheep's milk cheese, made on site at their three-acre farm.

Serves 4 to 6



- 8 oz. brebis (soft, spreadable sheep's milk cheese)
- 1 T. extra virgin olive oil, plus more for brushing baguette slices
- 1 T. fresh lemon juice (optional)
- Flaky salt, like Maldon
- 1 baguette, sliced thin

Place brebis, olive oil and lemon juice in a food processor and process until light and smooth, about 1 to 2 minutes.

Brush both sides of baguette slices with olive oil and toast or grill in a pan or oven just prior to serving.

Put whipped brebis into a piping bag and pipe onto toasted slices of baguette.

Serve as is or top with a drizzle of olive oil, lemon zest and a sprinkle of flaky salt. For a sweet version, top with a drizzle of honey.

Roasted Beet and Feta Salad with Arugula

This salad is a delicious complement to roasted lamb (see recipe above). It also offers a welcome pop of color to the table and features True North's feta cheese.



Serves 4 to 6

- 4 beets, trimmed, cubed and roasted, served warm or cold
- 4 oz. feta, crumbled
- 4 C. arugula, packed
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lemon, cut in half
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Top 5 Most Desirable Lamb Cuts

Leg: Tender and moist, this cut is ideal for roasting and is perfect for any holiday celebration.

Rack/Chops: Both are tender and lean cuts that are easy to grill or pan-sear. The rack of lamb makes an impressive special meal, especially when two racks are tied together to form a crown roast.

Shoulder: A flavorful cut with more fat and connective tissue than other cuts, this is ideal for stews or braises.

Shank: This lean and flavorful cut from the leg of lamb becomes tender and juicy with low and slow cooking. Perfect for braising in a slow, simmering broth.

Ground Lamb: Mellow and mildly flavored, ground lamb is a perfect substitute for ground beef in many recipes, like lamb bolognese or lamb burgers.



Place arugula in a shallow salad bowl and sprinkle evenly with the roasted beets. Top with feta, sprinkled evenly.

Just before serving, drizzle olive oil generously over the entire salad. Then squeeze juice of a whole lemon directly and evenly over the top of the salad.

Finish with a sprinkle of salt and a few grinds of black pepper. Optional to toss before serving. ♦

NOTE TO READERS: *This is my last column, so I want to express my gratitude to the County Lines family, our region's dedicated farmers, artisans and chefs, and Brandywine Table readers. Later this year, I plan to focus on projects being launched by my publishing company.*



Courtney Diener-Stokes is an award-winning journalist, author, food writer, photographer and food stylist. She lives in the Oley Valley countryside with her husband, three children, two Babydoll Southdown sheep, a flock of bantam chickens and a Bernedoodle named Daisy.

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