

Cooking with Tony

By Tim Hoey, photos by Dan Epstein



Chef Tony Grande



Sugo di carne d'agnello (Lamb demi-glaze)

Note: Leftover demi-glaze can be frozen and used in lamb shank or other recipes.

2 lbs. lamb bones, cut into 2"-3" pieces	4 fresh sage leaves
1 stalk celery, cut into 1/2" pieces	2 sprigs fresh rosemary
1 carrot, cut into 1/2" pieces	3 sprigs fresh thyme
1 white onion, cut into 1/2" pieces	Fresh parsley, lightly chopped
3 tablespoons all purpose flour	1 1/2 tablespoons tomato paste
34 oz. cold water (30 oz., then 4 oz.)	8 oz. red wine

Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 475 degrees. Put lamb bones in roasting pan and cook in oven for 30 minutes. Add celery, carrot, and onion and return to oven for 15 minutes. Add red wine to roasting pan and cook until wine has evaporated, around 10 minutes. Remove roasting pan from oven, discard bones, and place rest of cooked ingredients in a deep, thick-bottomed pot on stovetop.

Add fresh herbs, salt, pepper and 30 oz. of water. Stir in tomato paste and parsley. Cook until liquid reaches a boil. Meanwhile, mix flour and four ounces of cold water into a lump-free, smooth blend. Add to pot, mix all ingredients well, and cook uncovered for 90 minutes to two hours over low to medium heat. Check pot occasionally and stir mixture with wooden spoon, to avoid sticking. When finished, strain mixture using a fine mesh strainer or a chinois.

(For thinner demi-glaze, add water to mixture. For thicker glaze, cook longer until it reaches desired consistency.)

Ossobuco d'agnello al vino rosso con topinabur

Lamb shanks with red wine sauce and Jerusalem artichokes. Serves four.

4 lamb shanks, similar sizes and cut from hind leg	4 sprigs of fresh thyme, chopped fine
12-20 Jerusalem artichokes, cleaned and washed	10 oz. lamb demi-glaze (see accompanying recipe)
1 small-medium white onion, cut into 1/16" pieces	8 oz. Italian peeled, crushed tomatoes
1 medium carrot, cut into 1/16" pieces	1 teaspoon fresh, chopped Italian parsley
2 celery stalks, cut into 1/16" pieces	3 cloves of garlic, chopped
4-6 oz. all-purpose flour	10 oz. red wine
4 oz. vegetable oil	10 oz. chicken broth
4 fresh sage leaves, chopped fine	1/2 teaspoon grated lemon peel
1 spring of rosemary, chopped fine	Salt & pepper to taste

Aluminum foil

Preheat oven to 475 degrees. Meanwhile, put vegetable oil in a frying pan and cook on stovetop over high heat until hot. At the same time, dredge lamb shanks in flour. Pound shanks by hand to remove any excess flour.

Place shanks in hot oil, cook in high heat until golden brown on each side. Then add chopped garlic and continue cooking for 3 to 4 minutes. Put in celery, carrot, and onion and braise on high heat for 10 minutes. Add red wine and cook until wine evaporates, around 10-15 minutes. Add demi-glaze, chopped tomatoes, herbs, salt, pepper, chicken broth, and lemon peel to pan. Mix ingredients well.

Remove everything from pan and place in clean, large, ovenproof skillet. Cover skillet with aluminum foil. Place pan into the preheated oven and cook for 90-100 minutes, depending on size of shanks. About 15-20 minutes before lamb shanks are finished, remove skillet, add Jerusalem artichokes, and return covered skillet to oven.

To determine when the meat is properly cooked, use the following technique: stick a fork into the meat, taking care not to touch the bone. If there's no resistance to the fork, the meat is ready.

Serve directly from the skillet to the plate.

Celebrate Delights of Spring with Light, Fresh Food

For many of us, lamb and spring are natural partners. From a holiday roast lamb to a field-fresh lamb stew, the season Italians call *primavera* inspires us to celebrate with delicious food. And lamb is a logical, even lyrical choice for this annual festival of renewal. Young lamb, a couple of months old in early spring, is a harbinger of the season. That fact, along with lamb's classical associations, reminds us of nature's rhythms and our relationship with them.

Those connections are especially cherished in Italy. That agreeable notion led us to visit Tony Grande, owner and chef of Il Capriccio, so we could gain his insights on lamb, the spirit of primavera, and the Italian way to enjoy this glorious time of year.

Tony: Spring is the best of the seasons. Renewal of life is all around us, from flowers to trees. And experiencing those life cycles is very important, because it helps us renew ourselves. It's the most harmonious time of year, and the world becomes a bit of paradise.

Tim: The return of fresh ingredients contributes to that feeling. We can make dishes with a refreshing sparkle and lightness consistent with the season's bounty.

Tony: The flavor from the trees and the earth gives us the magic we enjoy in our food. You can taste it in the new weeds and sprouts, such as wild chicory, wild cardoons, and especially wild asparagus.

Tim: I only know wild asparagus by reputation.

Tony: When I was a kid, I would go out and find some. If you know how to cook it, wild asparagus can be among the best items in Italian cooking. I would make a frittata with still-warm, fresh eggs and wild asparagus. It was very, very good—because wild asparagus has an outstanding, unique taste.

Tim: I imagine the spring lamb does, too.

Tony: We cooked lamb for Easter. Lamb is one of the best meats, very good and very lean. With young lamb, the meat is beautiful and appropriate to the season. It's not like veal, which needs to be tenderized.

Tim: Can one find good lamb here?

ITALIAN PRIMAVERA INSPIRES TEMPTING LAMB DISHES

Tony: There's good, fresh lamb produced in America. The best known is from Colorado, and that's what I prefer. Some people buy frozen lamb, but I think it's a very distant second choice. Freezing kills the best qualities of the product, regardless of the point of origin.

Tim: In your lamb shanks recipe, you include Jerusalem artichokes. I was very curious about that addition.

Tony: I added them as an original touch, as they rarely appear in lamb recipes. By the way, Jerusalem artichokes are excellent for people with diabetes, as the starch doesn't turn into sugar.

Tim: When did you first have them?

Tony: When I was ten years old. One spring, I found a garden where some tall flowers were growing. I pulled one out and saw what looked like a potato or ginger at its root. At the time, I didn't realize it was an edible tuber. I cleaned it, tasted it and liked its nice, pleasant taste. Later, when I asked what it was, no one knew. I found out when I was fifteen and attending culinary school. The chef showed the tuber and presented us with a recipe for *topinabur* – Jerusalem artichokes.

Tim: And now, for our primavera, we'll have an opportunity to discover them when we make your lamb shanks recipe. Thank you, Tony. ▲