

Sicilian Lamb with Braised Vegetables

This is a typical Southern Italian recipe for pungent ground lamb in a mild red sauce. It was adapted from a recipe out of [Bon Appetit](#) magazine. It's great with a nice bottle of wine.

If you have polenta around the kitchen, you probably don't need me to tell you how to make it. If not, I have included instructions for making an approximation with corn meal. If you really don't like polenta or corn-meal, you can serve this dish over any type of pasta.

Serves 4.

Ingredients for Lamb:

- ½ cup fresh breadcrumbs (from crust-less bread, chopped)
- ¼ cup water
- 1 pound ground lamb
- ½ cup shredded pecorino cheese (Parmesan or Romano are acceptable substitutes)
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1 Tbs chopped fresh mint (or 1 tsp dry)
- 1 Tbs chopped fresh oregano (or 1 tsp dry)
- ½ tsp coarse salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
- ¼ tsp ground cinnamon

Ingredients for Eggplant mixture:

- 1 large eggplant (about 1 pound), unpeeled, cut into ¾-inch cubes
- 6 Tbs olive oil
- Coarse salt and black pepper
- 1 large red bell pepper, seeded, cut into 1/2-inch-wide strips about 2-1/2" long
- 1 cup finely chopped onion
- 1½ cups dry white wine
- 3 large garlic cloves, minced
- 28 oz chopped tomatoes with their juice
- 2 tsp chopped fresh oregano (or ¾ tsp dry)

Ingredients for Polenta:

- 4 cups water
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 Tbs olive oil
- 1 cup yellow corn meal
- ½ cup shredded pecorino cheese (Parmesan or Romano are acceptable substitutes)
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More cheese and chopped fresh parsley for garnish

Technique

1) Roast the eggplant

Preheat oven to 400°F. Combine cubed eggplant and 4 Tbs oil in a large bowl and toss to coat. Spread eggplant out on rimmed baking sheet; sprinkle with coarse salt and pepper. Bake 15 minutes. Turn eggplant over and bake until soft and slightly brown, about 15 minutes longer.

2) Prepare the lamb

While the eggplant bakes, combine breadcrumbs and water in a large bowl. Soak 5 minutes. Squeeze all water from crumbs and discard the water. Add lamb and remaining ingredients; mix thoroughly with a fork. Shape into 8 oval patties, each about 2½ inches long and ¾ inch thick.

3) Sauté the lamb and peppers

Heat 1 Tbs oil in a large, deep skillet over medium-high heat. Add lamb patties and sauté until brown, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer lamb patties to plate. Add bell pepper strips to drippings in skillet; sauté until beginning to soften, about 4 minutes. Transfer bell pepper to plate with lamb.

4) Make the sauce

Reduce skillet heat to medium. Add the remaining 1 Tbs olive oil and chopped onion to the same skillet. Cook until the onion is soft, stirring occasionally, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook for another minute. Add wine and cook on high scraping up browned bits, until wine is reduced to glaze, about 7 minutes. Return lamb and bell pepper to skillet; add eggplant, tomatoes, and oregano. Reduce heat to medium-low. Cover and simmer until the lamb is cooked through and vegetables are tender, about 12 minutes. If sauce is thin, simmer uncovered until thickened to desired consistency. Season sauce to taste with coarse salt and pepper.

5) Make the polenta and serve

Bring water and salt to a boil in heavy large saucepan over medium-high heat. Gradually whisk in corn meal. Reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer until polenta is very thick, whisking often, about 5-10 minutes. Stir in the olive oil and the pecorino just about a minute before serving.

Spoon the polenta into shallow bowls. Top with lamb and vegetables. Sprinkle with additional pecorino cheese and chopped parsley