

Crown Roast of Lamb + Saffron Rice & Apricot-Mint Sauce (for 4-6)

Source: www.splendidtable.org

Adapted from *How to Cook Meat* by Chris Schlesinger & John Willoughby.

Basically, the crown roast consists of 2 racks of lamb cut through the backbone & the chine bone & fashioned into a circle resembling a crown. Forming the crown is not that easy, so you'll want to have the butcher do it for you. He will also "french" the bones (scraping the meat away from the ends of the bones so they look neat & pretty - If you want to go the whole 9 yards, you can even buy those little French white paper hats to put on the ends of the bones after the roast comes from the oven.)

There are 3 components to our version of this dish, so there's a little coordination needed. Since the sauce can easily be reheated, we think it best to get the sauce started, then make the rice, then put the lamb in the oven. Of course, you can save time by making the sauce while the lamb is in the oven, which is certainly fine. But there's 1 good reason to get the sauce out of the way first: You're working with a very expensive cut of meat, so, take a lot of care with it. Make sure you have a meat thermometer, for example, because that's the only way to tell when the lamb is cooked to your liking - start checking right after you reduce the oven heat to 300° F. Overcooking is the surest way to ruin this piece of meat.

Of course, how you treat this cut really depends on how fancy you want the final dish to look. If you aren't concerned with presentation & want to save time, you can simply prop the 2 racks up against each other like hands forming a steeple with the fingers interlocking & roast them like that. This is known in the trade as an "honor guard."

Either way, rack of lamb is very easy to serve - just cut between the ribs with a knife, and you'll have rib chops. They're small, so, 4 per person. For a really bang-up sumptuous feast, serve this with sautéed watercress, Potatoes Anna (page 409) or Au Gratin Potatoes (page 410), and a lettuce salad with homemade blue cheese dressing.

For the Sauce

- * 1 teaspoon unsalted butter
- * 1 small red onion, peeled and diced small
- * 3/4 C dry red wine
- * 3/4 C red wine vinegar
- * 1/3 C apricot preserves
- * 1/3 C roughly chopped fresh mint
- * Kosher salt & freshly cracked black pepper to taste

For the Rice

- * 1 TBS unsalted butter
- * Large pinch of saffron
- * 1 TBS ground coriander
- * 1 small red onion, peeled, halved, and thinly sliced
- * 1 1/2 C long-grain white rice
- * 3 C water or chicken stock
- * 1/4 C sliced almonds, toasted in a dry skillet over medium heat, shaken frequently, until fragrant, 3-5 minutes
- * 3 TBS roughly chopped fresh parsley
- * Kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper to taste
- * 1 lamb rib crown roast (2 racks, about 1 1/2 pounds each, frenched & tied in a crown shape)
- * 2 TBS olive oil
- * Kosher salt & freshly cracked black pepper to taste
- * 2 TBS minced garlic
- * 2 TBS freshly cracked coriander seeds (or 1 TBS ground coriander)
- * 1/2 C roughly chopped fresh parsley

Make the sauce: In a medium sauté pan, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add onion & cook, stirring occasionally, till translucent (7-9 minutes). Add the wine, vinegar & preserves - simmer till sauce is reduced to about 1 C (35-40 minutes). Remove pan from heat, add mint & season with salt & pepper. Preheat oven to 500° F.

Make the rice: In a medium sauté pan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the saffron, coriander & onion - cook, stirring occasionally, till onion is translucent (7-9 minutes). Add rice & stir to coat with oil, then add water. Bring to simmer, cover/reduce heat to low & cook till all liquid has been absorbed (15-18 minutes). Stir in almonds & parsley - season with salt & pepper. Cover pan with a tea towel, put lid on & set aside.

While rice is cooking, dry the lamb with paper towels, then rub it with the olive oil & sprinkle generously with salt & pepper. In small bowl, combine garlic, coriander & parsley - mix well, then rub mixture all over the meat, pressing gently to be sure it adheres. Place lamb on rack in roasting pan & roast 20 minutes. Reduce heat to 300° F & continue to cook 5-15 minutes more for medium-rare, which is how we like it, or longer if you like it more well-done. To check for doneness, insert meat thermometer into dead center of roast & let sit 5 seconds, then read temperature (120 degrees is rare, 126 degrees is medium-rare, 134 degrees is medium, 150 degrees is medium-well, and 160 is well-done).

When lamb is finished, transfer to a serving platter & pile saffron rice in the center. Cover with aluminum foil & allow meat to rest 10-20 minutes. (While it is resting, you may want to reheat the sauce.)

To serve, spoon out rice onto plates. Cut butcher's twine & slice the racks into individual chops. Top rice with chops & pass sauce separately.