

## Last of the Summer Produce

### Hearty and distinctive one-pot cooking

By Chef Dan Leff

Late summer produce can be disappointing. Corn and squash are tougher, woodier. Tomatoes are blander (and more expensive). But there are ways of using these vegetables to satisfying effect ... and incorporate autumn treasures (like mushrooms and chilies), as well.

This is a twist on traditional lamb stew. It uses a technique, commonly found in Indian cuisine, of cooking onions and tomatoes into a paste as a thickener for the stew. This stew has a bit of a kick to it from the jalapenos, which makes it good for crisp late Summer/early Fall evenings. It goes well with fresh artisan bread. I like to leave the potatoes unpeeled for extra nutrients, but that's a personal choice.

The best type of pan in which to make this stew will be about 2" deep, with a width of at least 8". Optionally, you can brown the lamb in a skillet, then transfer the fully cooked paste from Step 4 to a pot before continuing with Step 5. The important thing is to use a pan that's shallow enough for the lamb to really brown (in Step 2) and not steam in it's own juices.

#### End-of-Summer Lamb Stew (serves 6-8)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1-1/2# Lamb stew meat, cut into 1" chunks   | Seasoning for the lamb:<br>1 TB. ground cumin seed<br>1/2 tp. cayenne pepper<br>1/2 tp. black pepper<br>1 TB. salt |
| 3 TB. vegetable oil   |  |
| 2 medium yellow onions, small diced   |  |
| 3-4 cloves of garlic, fine chopped  |  |
| 6 roma tomatoes, small diced  |  |
| 2 jalapenos, seeded and fine chopped  |  |
| 12 ounces chicken stock   |  |
| 4 ounces red cooking wine   |  |
| 1/2# small, fresh button mushrooms, washed and left whole<br>(if small mushrooms are not available, cut larger mushrooms into halves or quarters) |  |
| 2 medium russet potatoes cut into 1" chunks   |  |
| 2 zucchini squash, cut into 1/2" rounds   |  |
| 1/4# fresh spinach, thoroughly cleaned  |  |
| Salt and pepper   |  |



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1. Before preparing the vegetables, mix lamb chunks in a bowl with seasonings (above). Allow to sit. Prepare all vegetables.
2. Heat oil in pan over high-heat. When oil is hot, add seasoned lamb. Cook until lamb is browned on all sides. Remove lamb (+ any juices) to a bowl.
3. Reduce heat to medium-high and add the diced onions to the pan. Cook the onions, stirring constantly to pick up all the browned juices left from the lamb. Cook until the onions have become translucent (about 5-6 minutes).
4. Add the garlic, tomatoes, and jalapenos. Stir constantly until the mixture becomes dry and paste-like – this will take at least 8-10 minutes. Don't let the mixture scorch! Reduce heat to medium if the cooking seems like it's going too fast.
5. Add the chicken stock and wine to the paste. Stir to even out the mixture. Add the lamb chunks and mushrooms and bring to a boil.
6. Simmer the lamb and mushrooms over low heat, with the pan (or pot) mostly covered, for 30 minutes. Stir occasionally.
7. Add the potatoes. Stir to mix in thoroughly. Turn up the heat to bring the mixture to a boil again, then lower the heat to a simmer, and cook, mostly covered, for 20 minutes. Stir occasionally.
8. Add the zucchini and spinach. Stir just to mix in. Cook 5 minutes, uncovered. If the stew is too soupy, turn heat to high and cook uncovered for 5-6 minutes to reduce the liquids. Adjust taste for salt and pepper only at the very end. Serve in shallow soup bowls with bread on the side.

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