

Nigel Slater's recipe for braised neck of lamb with apricots and cinnamon

Neck of lamb is cheap, fatty and almost indestructible, but tucked up in a pan with spices and onions for a few hours and it all breaks down into a soft, spoonable delight that makes for a luxurious supper



📷 Braised neck of lamb with apricots and cinnamon. Photograph: Jonathan Lovekin

Something sharp to cut the fat is good here. Dried apricots have a pleasing tang that works well with lamb - like cooking apples do with pork. Neck of lamb is my first choice for this treatment, but I would also recommend small shanks. I usually reckon on at least 3g neck of lamb per person. This sounds quite a lot, but we are talking about one of the most bone-rich cuts of meat, so the quantity of meat should be just about right. The hands-on work is very straightforward.

Serves 4

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middle neck of lamb 1.25kg (8 pieces)
plain flour 3 tbsp
groundnut or olive oil 2 tbsp, plus a little more
onions 2 medium-to-large
cumin seeds 1 tsp
ground coriander 2 tsp
crushed dried chilli half a tsp or so ½ tsp
garlic 2 cloves
fresh ginger a 3cm lump
lemon zest 2 strips, about 6cm long
a cinnamon stick
dried apricots 250g
stock or water 750ml
To serve:
chopped mint 2 tbsp
lemon zest 1 tsp finely grated

Dust the lamb with the flour and season with salt and black pepper. Heat a couple of tablespoons of oil in a large, heavy-based casserole pan (with lid). Add the lamb and let the pieces brown lightly on both sides. You will probably need to do them in two batches.

Remove the lamb from the pan, leaving behind any oil (if it has blackened, wipe out the pan and start again with fresh oil). Set the oven at 160C/gas 3.

Peel and roughly chop the onions. Add them to the pan and allow to soften for 10 minutes or so over a moderate heat. Stir in the whole cumin seeds and ground coriander. Sprinkle in the dried chilli.

Peel the garlic, slice it finely, then add it to the onions. Peel the ginger, shred it finely and add it to the pan together with the lemon zest and cinnamon. Add the apricots, then pour in the stock or water.

Return the lamb to the pan. Season carefully. Bring to the boil, cover with a lid and place in the oven for 90 minutes, until the lamb is tender enough to fall away from the bone.

As you serve, scatter the surface with fresh mint and lemon zest.