

A cut above the rest

Carving the Sunday roast is no longer a task just for the boys—we could all benefit from a masterclass in this dying art, says Mark Hix

IS carving really the man's job in the house? In my experience, when men carve they tend to make a complete hash of a good joint, not knowing which end to start with and trying to carve it paper thin.

Part of the blame, I suppose, lies with overcooked joints, because once you've taken your meat beyond medium, it's time to get the hacksaw out. Blunt knives and wobbly chopping boards are also a problem, and very risky, too. Whether you're carving or chopping an onion, a blunt knife can be the most dangerous thing in the kitchen—especially if your chopping board hasn't got a damp cloth under it to stabilise it.

Roast leg of lamb

Serves 6–10

A leg of lamb can be tricky to carve, but the end result of it being cooked on the bone is far superior to that of a boned and rolled one.

Ingredients

1 leg of lamb, weighing about 2kg
A little vegetable oil
1 head of new-season garlic or a few cloves of normal garlic, thinly sliced
A few sprigs of rosemary
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method

Pre-heat the oven to 220°C/430°F/gas mark 7. Season the lamb with salt and freshly ground black pepper, then heat a little vegetable oil until almost smoking in a heavy frying pan large enough to fit the lamb.

Seal the lamb on all sides until nicely browned, then remove from the pan. Make nine or 10 incisions about 1cm deep through the skin of the lamb and insert a slice of garlic and



A pink, juicy, perfectly roasted leg of lamb requires careful carving—make sure you do it justice

a sprig of rosemary into each. If you're using new-season garlic, you'll only need to peel off the outer skin.

Place the lamb in a roasting tray and cook in the oven for 30 minutes, then turn the oven down to 190°C/375°F/gas mark 5 and cook it for another 30–40

minutes for medium rare.

To serve, leave the lamb to rest for 15 minutes, then get carving. If you're right-handed, have the knuckle bone to your left, and, holding the bone in your left hand, carve slices (not too thinly) at a 45° angle towards the knuckle and in

to the bone. Continue doing this until you get to the end, then turn the leg around and continue on the other side.

As you're carving, it helps to just turn the bone every so often and start carving on a fresh muscle, in order to make sure you get decent-sized slices.

Roast free-range chicken with hedgerow garlic sauce

Serves 2–4

Personally, I think that a traditional gravy often ends up drowning the natural flavours of a good free-range chicken. A sauce like this one acts as a kind of dip—much more subtle. Out of wild-garlic season, you can make it with baked garlic and add some parsley for colour, or if you've been sensible enough to preserve some wild garlic by blending and freezing, you can just stir in a couple of spoonfuls or so at the end.

Ingredients

1 free-range chicken
A few sprigs of thyme and rosemary
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
80g–100g duck fat
1 head of new season's garlic

For the wild-garlic sauce

60g–70g fresh white breadcrumbs
A handful or two of hedgerow-garlic leaves, washed and dried

Method

Preheat the oven to 200°C/390°F/gas mark 6. Season the chicken inside and out, pop the thyme, rosemary and garlic into its cavity, and rub the duck fat over the breasts and legs.

Roast in a tray for about 1–1¼ hours, basting regularly until the juices run clear when a skewer or knife tip is inserted into the thickest part of the thigh. Start it cooking sitting on one leg for 25 minutes, turn it on the other leg for another 25 minutes, and finish its cooking breast uppermost. When cooked, remove the chicken from the oven and leave to rest in a warm place for 15 minutes, reserving the fat from the tray.

While the chicken is resting, make the sauce. Remove the head of garlic from the bird, then halve it and squeeze or scoop out the soft inner flesh.

Warm the fat in the roasting tray with a couple of tablespoons of water, scraping the bottom of the tray to remove



A side order of vibrant, subtly flavoured wild-garlic sauce will enliven a classic roast chicken

any residue, then blend coarsely with the garlic and breadcrumbs in a liquidiser or food processor. Season with salt and pepper and transfer to a saucepan. Roughly chop the wild-garlic leaves and stir into the sauce. Simmer gently for a few minutes and transfer to a jug or sauce boat.

Serve the chicken, carved or jointed, with the sauce. *Mark Hix's 'Seasonal Food' is available from Quadrille at £25*

Sharpen your skills

Mark Hix's carving masterclasses at Brown's Hotel in Mayfair, London, cost £150 per person for a two-hour class, including dinner, a Brown's Hotel apron and a signed Hix cookery book. They run from 6pm to 8pm on December 15, January 11, January 25, February 9 and March 15 (020-7518 4163; www.brownsotel.com)

