



The
Twisted
Soul
Cookbook

*Modern
Soul Food with
Global Flavors*

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RIZZOLI
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COCOA-CRUSTED RACK OF LAMB

With Dark Cherry Gravy

SERVES 8

4 medium lamb racks (about 8 pounds total)
2 tablespoons tamarind paste
½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 teaspoon Ethiopian mitmita spice (or berbere spice blend; see headnote)
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1½ teaspoons Lawry's Seasoned Salt
1 tablespoon smoked paprika
¼ cup packed light brown sugar
Dark Cherry Gravy (page 179), for serving

Kansas City, where I was born, is rightly known worldwide for its barbecue. It used to be that on every barbecue menu you would find mutton, the meat of an adult sheep. Mutton is strong in taste, and maybe that's why it lost popularity and is now difficult to find. This technique for smoking lamb creates, in my opinion, the best-tasting barbecue you will ever have.

I experimented with other cuts of lamb to try to re-create the delicious barbecue I grew up with, and this is the closest I've come yet to the flavor of those childhood memories. The sweet-tart tamarind and the mitmita spices blend of bird's eye chili peppers, cloves, and cardamom, among other ingredients, balance the mutton's gamy notes (look for mitmita online from specialty purveyors or try berbere seasoning as a substitute). It is perfect for an elegant dinner entrée or a cocktail party. Don't take my word for it: I have won many accolades and awards with this recipe.

In addition to the Dark Cherry Gravy, the lamb also pairs well with Sweet Tea Barbecue Sauce (page 168).

Carefully trim the excess fat from the racks. Keep in mind that retaining some fat does add to the flavor, so be careful not to over trim. Rub the tamarind paste over each rack.

Thoroughly mix together the remaining ingredients for the cocoa crust. Sprinkle the lamb racks with the mixture, making sure to cover all sides well. Transfer the seasoned racks to a large resealable plastic bag and refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours.

When ready to cook the lamb, prepare a charcoal grill, arranging coals more heavily in the center and lighter on the side. This will create a two-zone surface for grilling, with high heat in the center and a cooler zone around the edge. (You can do these racks on a gas grill as well, but I prefer the additional flavor and char you get from a charcoal grill.)

Lightly spray the grate with nonstick cooking spray or rub with vegetable oil and place over the coals to heat. Once the coals are hot, put the racks on the grill, meat side down, in the center of the grate over high heat to achieve a sear. Be mindful of flare-ups so the meat does not burn. Grill for 5 to 6 minutes on each side, until well browned, then transfer the racks to the low-heat zone around the edge of the grate and cover the grill.

Continue cooking, covered, for about 15 minutes, until the internal temperature of the lamb is 140 to 145 degrees F for medium rare (longer if you prefer it more done). Let the racks rest for 5 to 10 minutes before cutting into the ribs. Serve with dark cherry gravy.

DARK CHERRY GRAVY

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 shallot, chopped
¼ cup coarsely chopped onion
¼ cup coarsely chopped celery
¼ cup coarsely chopped carrot
¼ cup all purpose flour
5 cups low sodium beef broth,
at room temperature, divided
1 bay leaf
10 to 12 whole black peppercorns
2 cups frozen dark cherries (12
to 14 ounces), thawed
¼ cup balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon cracked black pepper

This recipe is a cross between gravy and barbecue sauce, so I serve it with smoked meats, pork, and poultry. The result is actually a lot richer in flavor than your average gravy because the technique is similar to that of a French demi-glace, but a lot less complicated. Try it especially on the Cocoa-Crusted Rack of Lamb (page 36)—the cherry adds a nice fruity note that plays against the slightly bitter char from the cocoa on the lamb.

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Stir in the shallot, onions, celery, and carrots and cook for 5 minutes, or until the onions are translucent. Sprinkle in the flour and cook, stirring, for 3 minutes, or until the mixture starts to brown. Whisk in 4 cups beef broth, increase the heat to medium-high, and bring just to a boil. Immediately reduce the heat to low, add the bay leaf and peppercorns, and simmer for about 40 minutes, until the liquid has reduced by half. Remove from the heat and strain the gravy through a fine-mesh strainer, discarding the solids.

Return the gravy to the saucepan over low heat and stir in the remaining 1 cup of beef broth, the thawed cherries, and balsamic vinegar. Simmer for 15 minutes, then season with the salt and pepper.

Store in the refrigerator for 3 to 5 days or freeze for up to 2 months. Reheat over low heat before serving.