



Everyone is Irish on Saint Patrick's Day & Guinness Lamb Shanks

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Saint Patrick's Day is just around the corner. Pubs around the world will be filled to capacity and then some. Ireland's patron Saint will be honored and toasted in sleepy little village pubs in counties Cork and Clare and in cozy saloons in Dublin and Belfast. Everyone is Irish on Saint Patrick's Day so celebrations and parades will be held in Chicago, Boston and New York as well as small towns across the country. Not to be outdone Irish pubs in Dubai, Hong Kong and Moscow will join in the party. Fiddlers will fiddle, tenors will sing, jigs will be danced and Guinness will be quaffed.



Pubs have been a mainstay of Irish life for centuries. The tradition began in the Middle Ages when humble country cottages offered a pint, a meal and even a bed to weary travelers. Later, simple shops selling groceries and beer evolved to become homey spots to gather and share a pint after a hard day. Short for Public Houses, they were a sharp contrast to the hoity-toity private clubs used by the wealthy. Open to one and all, hard working men and women could always find a cozy home away from home at the village pub.

Irish pubs are steeped in romance and folklore. (But then, so is all of Ireland.) If you envision cozy rooms with low, heavy beamed ceilings and enormous hearths with crackling fires, you're pretty close to spot on. Irish pubs are warm, welcoming places where everyone knows your name. Or maybe that's a little bar in Boston.

Spirited conversation and quick wit are the most important ingredients in the pub experience. Election year or not, you can usually count on lively political debate. During Ireland's long struggle against English occupation and rule, the discussions often took a rebellious turn. Away from prying eyes and ears, pubs were perfect meeting places for dissidents to criticize colonial rule and even plan a few acts of rebellion. The English went so far as to outlaw these strongholds of nationalism and resistance but the independent Irish ignored the edict and pubs continued to flourish.

What could be better than whiling away the hours in a cozy tavern on a rainy afternoon or dull evening? You are sure to find easy, relaxed conversation as friends and strangers alike swap stories, share a joke or exchange a bit of harmless gossip. Simply put and borrowing from Gaelic, pubs are all about *craic* (pronounced crack) or having a *good time in good company*.

It is no surprise that Irish pub culture has been exported all over the world. Cozy bars with names like Murphy's and O'Connell's can be found in cities and towns from Boston to Bombay. When I lived in Switzerland I frequented Flanagan's in Geneva's old town, as well as Molly Malone's in Prague and Rosie O'Grady's in Moscow. I even shared a pint with a customer in an Irish pub in Dubai.

Outside the Emerald Isle Irish pubs don't quite fit the traditional image of a snug little tavern. Jigs are seldom, if ever, danced and tenors rarely sign. Still and all, there is Guinness and Kilkenny on tap and the bartenders have the good looks and charm of the Irish if not the birthright. Friends gather around rustic wooden tables and exchange tall tales, enjoy easy banter and a joke or two. Hundreds or even thousands of miles from the Ireland's emerald shores, Irish pubs can't help but inspire *craic*.

This Saint Paddy's Day, whether you recreate a pub atmosphere at home or head out for a pint, enjoy the celebration.

Sláinte (to your health) and bon appétit!

Guinness Lamb Shanks

What could be more Irish than lamb and Guinness? Have a fun and festive St. Paddy's Day!

Serves 6

4 ounces slab or thick cut bacon, roughly chopped
 Coarse kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
 6 lamb* shanks
 1 large onion, chopped
 3 garlic cloves, minced
 1/2 teaspoon dried chili flakes, or to taste
 4 stalks celery, cut into 1-inch pieces
 4 carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
 4 parsnips, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
 2-3 sprigs fresh thyme
 1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary
 1 bay leaf
 1 1/2-2 cups Guinness
 3-4 cups chicken stock
 1-2 tablespoons cider vinegar
 Garnish: fresh chopped mint and/or parsley

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Cook the bacon in a heavy casserole over medium-low heat until crisp and brown. Remove the bacon and reserve. Pour off any excess bacon fat, leaving just enough to lightly coat the pan and reserve.

Season the lamb shanks with salt and pepper and, working in batches, brown the lamb over medium-high heat. Add more bacon fat to the pan as needed. If you run out of bacon fat, substitute with a little olive oil. Remove the lamb and add to the reserved bacon.

Reduce the heat to medium. Add the onion, sprinkle with dried chili flakes and sauté until translucent. Add the garlic and sauté an additional 1-2 minutes.

Put the lamb and bacon back into the stew pot. Add the carrot, celery, parsnips, herbs and chicken stock; raise the heat and bring to a simmer. Cover the pot and transfer to the oven. Cook at 350 degrees for 2- 2 1/2 hours or until the vegetables and lamb are tender. Add more beer and/or stock if needed.

Carefully transfer the shanks and vegetables to a deep serving platter and cover. You want a nice rich sauce and may or may not need to bring it to a boil over high heat to reduce. Whisk in the vinegar. Ladle the sauce over the lamb shanks, garnish with chopped mint and parsley and serve.

** If you're not a lamb fan, substitute beef chuck and make a stew.*



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