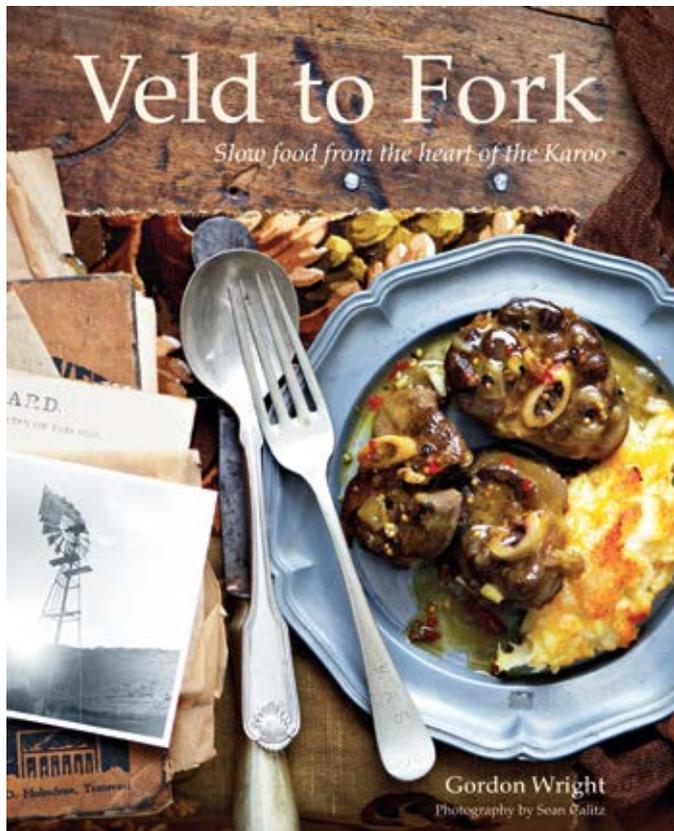


Karoo Lamb and Mutton

One of the food highlights of the year was the launch of Karoo Food legend Gordon Wright's new cook book *Veld to Fork*.



Gordon is the head of the Karoo Convivium of the International Slow food movement and a Professional member of the *Chaine Des Rôtisseurs* (An international Chefs guild dating its origins back to 1458). He owns the Andries Stockenström Guesthouse & Gordon's Restaurant in Graaff Reinet and is internationally renowned for his Karoo cuisine, using only the finest, locally sourced products. Merino lamb and mutton are of his favourite meats to work with. Here is an extract from his best-selling cook book, *Veld to Fork*, as well as a recipe.

Lamb is the *crème de la crème* of meats from the Karoo and people visit from all over the world to taste it.

I love cooking lamb, from shanks and stews to roasts with whole cloves of garlic pressed into the flesh. They say the nicest meat is closest to the bone, an ethos I wholly subscribe to, and a Karoo lamb neck slow-roasted in the oven or in a kettle braai is such a treat. Sticky lamb ribs are an all-time hit too and no holiday trip would be complete without a lamb and mint pie as *padkos*.

But first let's clear up a few misconceptions regarding lamb. You will note that the heading of this chapter refers to lamb *and* mutton. Although people tend to refer to both as lamb, there is quite a big difference.

In the Karoo, lamb tends to be exactly that: a young sheep roughly 1 year old with less than two teeth (*twee tand* as they say locally) and weighing around 40 kg (live weight). It is graded A or AB,

with a classification number 1–6 (with 1 being very thin and miserable, and 6 being really fatty). I use grade AB 2 or 3, which I consider the best grade lamb, as it comes from a young, fairly well developed animal with a 4–5 mm layer of fat and good meat to bone ratio, i.e. not too much bone and good meat coverage.

Muttons comes from an animal older than 1 year, that is larger and more developed and has 2–8 teeth. It falls into the B and C categories. A good quality buy for mutton would be graded, for example, B 2.

Whilst lamb tends to be much tenderer than mutton and is used by restaurateurs for their prime cuts, mutton has way more flavour and generally needs a longer cooking time. Either way it's a compromise between tenderness and flavour, so think about what you want to do with the cut before deciding what to buy. A tender chop on the braai (barbecue) should be lamb, but mutton is the best choice for a tasty winter casserole or stew. When in doubt, ask your butcher. I recommend you find a local butcher who is approachable and helpful and build a good relationship with him or her so that you get decent advice at the same time as supporting a local neighborhood business.

Now that you know what to look for when buying lamb, you need to know what makes Karoo lamb so special. The not so big secret about Karoo lamb and mutton is that it is raised and lives entirely out in the veld. It very seldom has any form of supplementary feeding, unlike most other livestock, and the old adage of 'you are what you eat' rings absolutely true.

The Karoo is situated in an arid semi-desert region which, at first glance and to the untrained eye, looks like nothing much at all. In reality, however, it is a massively rich and diverse environment that has developed over millions of years and is teeming with life.



The veld itself is a rich array of shrubs, grasses, succulents and wild herbs, including wild rosemary, camphor, lavender and sage. Essentially, what all these plants have in common are high concentrations of terpenoids and other volatile oils. Plant terpenoids are used extensively for their aromatic qualities and in traditional herbal remedies. This unique combination gives Karoo lamb and mutton its delicate flavour and makes it every cook's dream to work with, as very little needs to be done in order to bring out the best flavour.

Deboned Lamb & Venison shoulder roasted with peaches & thyme

This is a really tasty variation of the classic shoulder roast; Ask your butcher to debone the shoulders if you are not confident enough to do it yourself but it is really not that difficult so give it a go yourself.

I like to put the venison roast on the bottom with the fatty lamb on top so the lamb juices can drip into the venison. I tie the roasts together with string or use butchers netting with a layer of nice fresh herbs and peaches sandwiched in between to ensure a lovely flavour infusion and that all important sweetness that venison loves so much. Try to keep this dish as simple as possible as the natural meat flavours are fantastic and you don't want to spoil these by overcomplicating it.

Serves 6-8 people

Ingredients

- 1 lamb shoulder roast – boned & butterflied
- 1 venison shoulder roast – boned & butterflied
- 1 large handful fresh thyme
- 2 x fresh stoned & chopped peaches (you can cheat and use tinned peaches if you want)
- Salt & pepper
- Olive oil
- 1 x peeled and quartered potato per person

Method

Score the fatty side of the lamb roast with a sharp knife to help release the fat during the cooking process. Rub both roasts with olive oil and salt and pepper to taste. Place together with thyme and the layer of peaches sandwiched in between, with lamb roast on the top, fatty side up. Tie them together with string or stuff into butchers netting.

Place into a roasting pan, surround with potatoes and roast uncovered at 180 ° C for 1 ½ - 2 hours (basting occasionally with pan juices) until meat is tender and can easily be pulled off the roast with your fingers.

Once cooked remove from roasting pan, allow to rest for 20 minutes and slice ensuring you mix the two meats together.

Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful!

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