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I REMEMBER THE LONG DAYS OF SUMMER when I was a kid growing up east of Portland. You could leave home on your bike and spend entire days just hanging out with your friends. The sun in the sky was the only measure of when it was time to come in for dinner. Near my house, there was an abandoned orchard with neglected fruit trees and berry bushes. No one had lived there for years. In spring, you would see the apples forming on the tree branches and the cherry trees covered with blooms. In summer, there were plums, crabapples and even a grape vine growing near what used to be the front of the house. We ate plenty of pinkish Rainier cherries that grew on the trees nearby. The old orchard was plowed under for homes in the late '70s, but now, when I drive down Hogan past Cherry Park Road on my way to Portland, I still remember when it was a kid's fruitful playground.

Oregon has a long history with its cherries. In the 1850s, Seth Lewelling settled in Milwaukie, Oregon, where he established a commercial fruit tree nursery. The Bing cherry was named after a Chinese foreman who worked for him. And that maraschino cherry that's bobbing around in your Manhattan cocktail was perfected by a horticulturist who joined the faculty of Oregon Agricultural College in 1919. Processing maraschino cherries became a big industry in Oregon during the mid-twentieth century, and the nation's two biggest maraschino manufacturers are still right here in Oregon.

Cherries are always great in pies and pastries, but they are also delicious in savory sauces for duck, lamb, pork or venison. Their rich color and bright flavor is perfect with some of these gamey meats. In this recipe, I have added Indian spice to a rack of lamb by using Garam Masala in the rub. The sweet and sour cherry gastrique tastes great with the spicy rub, and the dark cherry raita is cool and creamy with Greek yogurt, crunchy cucumber and mint. I used frozen pie cherries for the gastrique. Make sure they have no added sugar. Pitted fresh cherries are used in the raita, but canned unsweetened Bing cherries can be found year-round at better grocery stores.



Indian Spiced Rack of Lamb with Sour cherry Gastrique and Sweet Cherry Raita

(Serves 2)

- 1 rack of lamb 8-10 ribs, frenched and trimmed of most of the fat
- 2 tablespoons Garam Masala
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Freshly ground pepper

For the gastrique:

- 3 cups frozen unsweetened sour cherries (enough to produce 1 cup of juice)
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 1/2 cups beef stock
- Kosher salt to taste

For the raita:

- 2 cups plain Greek yogurt
- 1 jalapeño pepper finely chopped
- 1/2 cup chopped pitted sweet cherries
- 1 tablespoon chopped mint
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 English cucumber finely chopped
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste



VIDEO

To watch the Home Grown Chef prepare this meal, visit 1859magazine.com

Make the Gastrique. Place cherries in a food mill or processor and mix or mill until pulverized. Strain through a mesh strainer to get one cup of cherry juice. Place sugar in heavy medium saucepan. Heat over medium heat until sugar begins to melt. Stir until sugar dissolves, then cook without stirring until deep golden, about five minutes. Watch carefully so it doesn't burn. Gradually add the vinegar (mixture will harden). Stir until caramel melts, about one minute. Add cherry juice; boil until mixture begins to thicken, about five minutes. Add broth, and boil until gastrique coats spoon and is reduced to generous half cup, about fifteen minutes. Set aside and keep warm.

Preheat oven to 325°F. Trim lamb racks of most of the fat and silverskin. Place Garam Masala, salt and pepper on a plate and roll lamb in it to cover completely. Heat heavy sauté pan to medium high. Sear lamb on all sides until evenly browned. Place in oven on roast until internal temperature reaches 118°F for medium rare, about ten to fifteen minutes. Remove lamb from oven, cover and keep warm. Rest lamb while making raita.

Mix raita ingredients together in a medium bowl. Spoon a half cup or so of raita onto plate. Slice lamb between bones and place chops on plate next to raita. Spoon gastrique over lamb and serve immediately. ■