

## **Bob's Shepherd's Pie**

Shepherd's Pie is always made from lamb not ground beef. If beef is used it is called Cottage Pie.

I like to make Shepherd's Pie in individual servings rather than a large casserole that you serve from. So with that note, you can certainly make this in a casserole or large cast Iron pan. If you're like me, bring out your 3½" cast iron skillet to make a perfect serving size for each guest. The first time I made this I used my set of 6" skillet and found that it was twice too much for everyone when you have hors d'oeuvres, salad and then the entrée and dessert. So, use the 3½" size and then make some extra in a larger skillet to serve those eaters that may want more. Don't forget you will want to have cutting boards or very thick pot holders to protect the table from the hot pans when you serve.

Another item is the lamb. Remember we are using lamb not ground beef. It is certainly a completely different dinner with lamb rather than beef. Besides, to be a truly Irish dish, you need lamb. Now in the small town where I live, lamb is not always available and ground lamb is hardly if ever seen in the store. But when I make this I don't want to use ground lamb anyway. You see, I once checked out a master chef's discussion about ground beef where he tested three methods of making ground beef: With a meat grinder, with a food processor, and slicing with a knife into 1/8" to 1/4" or so squares. His testing determined both for taste but mostly for texture that the best method was to slice it up yourself. So that is what I recommend. Yes it takes more time, but makes a better product. Now for the meat itself; I find it best to try and get a lamb roast or better a leg of lamb that I can cut up. You will need 1/4 to 3/8 of a pound of lean cut up lamb for each serving. I find a leg best because you can cut large pieces and then dice or slice the meat into 1/8" to 1/4" or so squares. Now you will want to trim most of the fat and all the cartilage away from the meat before you slice it. SAVE the fat. Don't throw it away. Another thing, you may have more meat from the leg than you need, so cut up only what you need and leave the rest as large pieces that you can freeze and use as small roasts or something else for another meal. I used a semi boneless leg the first time that started with 6.6 lbs that gave me 3 lbs cut up lamb, a 1 1/4 lb roast with extra fat and an upper leg bone that I saved for a Seder meal another day.

If you don't use all the fat in this recipe, be sure to save the rest in the freezer for another use too. Lamb fat is so special and adds such a wonderful taste to other dishes.

Enough said – let's get to the recipe.

**So here we go.**

### **Ingredients**

Lamb about 1/4 + pound per person (using 3½" cast iron pans) cut as described above

Fat from the lamb cut up into 1/4" squares (from a leg you can get enough, from a roast it may not be possible to get enough and will need to use some oil)

Carrots peeled and cut into 3/8" cubes (about a carrot per person)

Frozen green peas

Frozen or canned sweet corn kernels (1/4 to 1/3 can per person)

Garlic finely diced (3 or 4 cloves)

Onion finely diced (one to two)  
Potatoes skinned and diced for making mashed potatoes (preferably Yukon Golds but what ever you like for mashed potatoes) about one medium per person  
Half & half and milk  
Butter  
Cream cheese  
Salt and Pepper  
Worcestershire Sauce  
Burgundy Wine  
Basil fresh or dried (fresh is always better if you can)  
Rosemary fresh or dried (fresh is always better if you can)  
Fresh Thyme and/or Fresh Mint (Optional for garnish)

### **The Process**

You may prepare this ahead of time or the day before as my method takes some time and it stores in the refrigerator just fine for a day.

Begin with the lamb as above as you like. Place the prepared lamb in a bowl and add basil, Worcestershire sauce, burgundy wine, rosemary, salt and pepper and let things soak for a while as you prepare the vegetables, etc.

Start a pot of water boiling for the potatoes add some salt and the potatoes and cook until tender.

Start another pot for the carrots add some salt and the carrots and cook until just tender.

Set out the frozen peas to defrost while cooking the rest.

Heat a large fry pan and add some of the sliced fat and a bit of salt and render it. Once rendered, set the cracklings aside as we will use them later. They should be brown and kind of crispy but not burned or black. Add the onions and garlic and sauté until well cooked and transparent then set them aside. Don't clean the pan.

If you have enough grease begin to sauté the lamb, if not add some more lamb fat and render. Be sure to keep the cracklings. Add the lamb and sauté until just barely done. The lamb can be slightly pink on the inside just nicely brown the outside. You will probably need to do this in batches. Set the batches aside when done and begin a new one. Continue until you have used up all the lamb.

Again, without cleaning the fry pan, add enough flour to soak up the lamb fat and scrape up the black bits from the frying. If you didn't have much fat left in the pan, you may want to render just a bit more before adding the flour. Let it heat for a time and then add any of the juice that is in the bowl holding the lamb and some of the potato water if needed and stir or whisk until it thickens. You might want to add a bit of salt and pepper to taste to this gravy. Once it is thick turn off the heat and let it stand.

Check the carrots. If done, drain and set them aside.

Check the potatoes for soft through doneness for making mashed potatoes. If done, turn off the stove until ready.

In a bowl mix together the sautéed lamb, drained carrots, garlic & onion mixture, and the peas. When mixed, dish out a good portion into each cast iron pan (or

casserole). Then add a little of the gravy to each pan until it is all used. Open the canned corn and drain well. Spoon out corn as a layer on top of the mixture in each pan, then place the pans in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.

While the pans are cooling in the refrigerator, we will make the mashed potatoes.

Drain the cooked potatoes and place in a bowl. Add some half & half, milk, butter, cream cheese and salt to taste and beat with a mixer to make the mashed potatoes. Add more milk and/or half & half if they get too stiff. Set the bowl aside.

While the potatoes are still a little warm and the pans are cooled bring out the pans one at a time and add mashed potatoes to the top. You will probably need to use the back side of a spoon as a spreader that has a bit of water with it to help spread the potatoes without disturbing the other things below. Make a complete 'crust' of potatoes from rim to rim to about  $\frac{1}{4}$ " below the rim of the pan. If you like once done, take a fork and make trails in the potatoes with the tines. This will help make browned peaks on the potatoes when cooking. Replace the pan back into the refrigerator covered with plastic wrap. Do the same procedure for each of the pans until complete.

The next day or later that day when you are ready, pre-heat the oven to 375°

Remove the pans from the refrigerator and when ready place the pans in the oven and bake for about 40 minutes. Use less time if the pans have not been in the refrigerator or more time if you have made a casserole that has much more depth to the dish.

Once cooked through, check to see if the tops are browned. If not, turn on the broiler and broil for 5 or so minutes to brown the tops a bit.

When done, remove from the oven and garnish the tops by placing some of the cracklings in the center of each pan in a small pile and then place some of the fresh thyme and/or fresh mint around the top but not on the cracklings. Serve by placing each pan per person on top of a wood board and let everyone know that the handles are HOT.

Enjoy!

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