



Lamb shanks with root vegetables are on the winter menu at Chakra in Paramus.

PETER MONSEES/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

A HANKERING FOR SHANKS

SLOW-COOKED CUTS YIELD A BOUNTY OF FLAVOR

By **BILL PITCHER**
STAFF WRITER

Andrea Frankel had the yearning for soup. Beef soup, like her father — a butcher — used to prepare for the family back in Austria. But without the recipe, and without him at her side, how was she to begin?

"Beef shanks," the young clerk at Fair Lawn's Swiss Pork Store said with authority. "You want beef shanks."

Frankel shrugged, but her soup a few hours later tasted just like her dad's, she said, with the beef

shanks laying a foundation for a thick, hearty stock, and the meat, eaten separately, emerging from the pot soft and tender.

"I grew up with soup every day, and it was always beef. This came out the same way I remember. It was perfect," she said.

No matter what animal they originate from, shanks are perfect for so many winter dishes — tender, meaty and full of deep flavors that can only be fully extracted by hours of low, slow cooking, which usually fills your kitchen with a comforting aroma reminiscent of Sunday dinner.

Shanks usually refer to the cuts of meat at the lower part of an animal's leg, but you probably know them by other names. Veal shanks are more commonly sold as osso bucco, the name of the braised dish for which they're popular. Pork shanks are usually called hocks. Beef shanks are sometimes called beef shin.

"Generally, they're not the most popular things we sell," said Steve Struble, who owns the Swiss Pork Store. "They're going to take awhile to cook, but I think people will tell you that they're worth it."

It's the high amount of connective tissue — the pro-

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How to cook them; what they cost

For common shanks, their popular cooking methods and the price at a large Bergen County butcher shop:



Beef shank: In America, they're usually base for beef soups and stews, but in Asian cuisine, shanks often are boiled, chilled and sliced thin. Also sold as shin beef. \$4.75 per pound.



Lamb shank: Usually braised with vegetables, like osso bucco. \$3.49 per pound.



Pork shank: Sometimes braised but usually added to slow-cooked soups or beans, particularly smoked shanks. Usually sold as hocks. \$1.29 per pound.



Veal shank: Most often browned, braised with vegetables and called osso bucco (they're often sold under that name, too), but occasionally it's slow-roasted. \$6.49 per pound.

In a rush? How to cook your shanks in 25 minutes. **Page F-6.**

Shanks: Braising brings out tenderness and rich flavor

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tein that holds meat together and can make certain cuts difficult to chew – that makes shanks unsuitable for grilling or sautéing but ideal for braising (cooking slowly in a bit of liquid while tightly covered) or simmering in a lot of liquid, as in soup.

After hours of low, slow heat, the collagen in the connective tissue breaks down, turning into liquid gelatin that adds body to the sauce, as well as making the meat more tender. Slow-cooking also will draw marrow out of shank bones, which adds both body and flavor.

“The slower you cook something – anything – the more flavor will always develop,” said Edward Lake, executive chef at Chakra restaurant in Paramus, whose winter menu includes braised lamb shanks with root vegetables. “And the mouth feel you’ll get in a sauce that starts this way, you won’t find anywhere else.”

Before braising, Lake suggests browning the meat in oil – he uses grape seed for its high smoke point – and a little bit of butter, and then sweating onions, celery and carrots (*mirepoix*) in the same pan until they’re softened. Many recipes call for meat to braise in a bit of stock, but Lake says water is sufficient, even if you plan to turn the braising liquid into a sauce, as he does.

“You’ll have the flavor from the meat, you’ll have the connective tissue, you’ll have the *mirepoix*, you’ll have the flavor from the bone,” he said. “All of that is going to lend itself to flavor the sauce.”

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■ Braised and roasted pork shanks

This dish, with prosciutto and porcini mushrooms, is perfect with mashed potatoes.

- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms
- 1 cup boiling water
- 4 whole fresh pork shanks with rind (each 1¼ to 1½ pounds)
- Salt and pepper
- 4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 1 cup chopped leek (white and pale green parts only)
- ½ cup chopped celery
- 2 ounces prosciutto, chopped
- 6 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup low-salt chicken broth
- 3 teaspoons chopped fresh sage, divided
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary, divided
- Chopped fresh Italian parsley

Place porcini mushrooms in small bowl. Pour boiling water over and let stand until mushrooms soften, at least 30 minutes. Drain and chop mushrooms, and reserve soaking liquid.

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Sprinkle pork with salt and pepper. Heat 3 tablespoons oil in a heavy, large wide pot over medium-high heat. Add pork, in batches if necessary, and sauté until brown on all sides, about 15 minutes. Transfer pork to rimmed baking sheet.

Spoon off and discard all but 2 tablespoons fat from pot. Reduce heat to medium. Add onion, carrots, leek, celery and prosciutto. Cover and cook until vegetables are soft and begin to color, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes. Mix in garlic and chopped porcini. Add wine and bring to boil, scraping up any browned bits. Add broth and reserved mushroom soaking liquid, leaving any sediment in bowl. Mix in 1 teaspoon sage and 1 teaspoon rosemary. Return pork and any accumulated juices to pot, arranging in single layer.

Bring pork mixture to boil, cover pot, and place in oven. Braise pork until very tender, turning over every 30 minutes, about 1 hour 30 minutes. (This can be done up to two days ahead.)

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Transfer pork to rimmed baking sheet. Brush with remaining 1 tablespoon oil; sprinkle with remaining 2 teaspoons sage, 1 teaspoon rosemary, and black pepper to taste. Roast pork until browned, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, tilt pot and spoon any fat from surface of sauce. Boil until sauce coats spoon lightly, about 7 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon sauce onto large shallow platter or divide among 4 shallow bowls. Top sauce with pork, sprinkle with parsley, and serve.

Servings: 4.

From: Gourmet magazine, January 2007.

■ Braised lamb shank

Chakra executive chef Edward Lake makes prominent use of root vegetables in this comforting wintertime dish.

- 4 tablespoons grape seed oil
- 2 1-pound lamb shanks
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 ribs celery, diced
- 4 carrots, diced
- 2 bay leaves
- 8 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- 2 cups red wine
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- Veal or beef stock
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 ounces each carrots, turnips, parsnips, rutabaga, in uniform 1-inch dice
- 2 ounces fingerling potatoes, in 1-inch chunks
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon chopped chives
- Onion compote, recipe follows

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Heat grape seed oil in a Dutch oven and brown shanks on all sides. Over medium heat, add onions, celery and carrots and brown lightly without burning the vegetables. Add bay leaves, garlic, paprika, curry powder, red wine and red wine vinegar.

Add enough stock to cover, season lightly with salt and pepper and place in oven. Cook for three hours, checking liquid every 30 minutes, adding water to keep meat covered, if necessary.

When shanks are fork-tender, remove meat and reserve in a warm place. Strain remaining liquid into a large saucepan and simmer, skimming off fats and impurities. Reduce until it reaches sauce consistency. Just before serving, season with salt and pepper to taste.

While sauce is reducing, blanch remaining vegetables in boiling salted water and cook until fork-tender. Drain, then toss lightly with butter and chives. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

To serve, arrange vegetables in bottom of a wide bowl, with lamb shank on top, and ladle ½ cup of sauce on top. Garnish with onion compote.

Servings: 2.

Note: In place of fingerling potatoes, any waxy potato, such as red bliss, can be substituted.

Onion compote

- 2 onions, thinly sliced
- 1 cup apple cider
- 1 cup champagne vinegar
- 1 cup sugar
- Salt and coriander to taste

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine all ingredients and simmer until reduced by two-thirds. Season with salt and coriander to taste. Keep warm until serving.

■ Roasted beef shanks with whole vegetables and potatoes

This versatile dish from Arthur Schwartz, author of “Arthur Schwartz’s New York City Food” (Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2004) can be served like a stew, or the garlic- and tomato-infused cooking liquid can be turned into a sauce.

- 4 large 1-inch-thick slices of beef shank (about 3½ pounds)
- Salt and pepper
- 8 medium carrots, peeled
- 8 onions (about 1½ to 2 pounds), peeled
- 2 or 3 parsnips, peeled
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 16 whole garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 13¼-ounce can beef broth
- 1 1-pound can Italian plum tomatoes
- 2 pounds all-purpose or boiling-type potatoes (such as Yukon gold or red bliss), peeled or unpeeled, cut into roughly 2-inch chunks, halved or quartered, depending on size
- 4 sprigs parsley
- ½ teaspoon thyme
- 1 large bay leaf

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

In an approximately 15- by 11-inch roasting pan, arrange the slices of beef shank, preferably without overlapping them. Sprinkle the meat with salt and pepper. Arrange the peeled carrots and onions over and between the meat. Cut the tapered ends of the parsnips off about halfway down each. Cut the heavier tops in half. Arrange all the pieces in the pan. Drizzle on the olive oil. Sprinkle the vegetables with salt and pepper.

Place in oven for 30 minutes. After 15 minutes, turn the meat over and rearrange the vegetables. After the 30 minutes, at which time the meat should be brown, remove the roasting pan and reduce heat to 350 degrees.

Add remaining ingredients to the pan, breaking up the tomatoes slightly with the side of a wooden spoon. Cover with foil and return to the oven for 1½ to 2 hours, until the meat and vegetables are very tender.

Serve as is in deep plates or bowls, or remove beef and vegetables (except the garlic) and place on a platter and cover with foil. Or make sauce by straining the juices into a saucepan, pushing through any tomato bits and the pulp from the whole cloves of garlic. Skim off the surface fat. Place over high heat and reduce juices slightly, stirring frequently. Pour the thickened and reduced juices over the meat.

Servings: 4 to 6.