



Howard Hillman's Great Peasant Dishes of the world

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Roghan Josh India

It originated as a peasant dish. Today, it is a popular national specialty.

Pronunciation:
roh'-gun joh'sh

Part 1 Recipe

■ Ingredients

Servings: 4

- **Lean leg of lamb**
700 grams or 1 1/2 pounds
cut into 3 centimeter
or 1 1/4 inch cubes
- **Whole milk yogurt**
12 centiliters or 1/2 cup
- **Crushed saffron**
1 milliliter or 1/4 teaspoon
- **Water**
30 milliliters or 2 tablespoons
- **Blanched almonds**
Coarsely chopped.
8 centiliters or 1/3 cup
- **Cardamom**
Seeds of 1 pod
- **Cumin seeds**
2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon
- **Coriander seeds**
2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon
- **Ghee (or clarified butter)**
50 milliliters or 3 tablespoons
- **Chopped white onions**
8 centiliters or 1/3 cup
- **Minced garlic**
5 milliliters or 1 teaspoon
- **Minced fresh ginger**
15 milliliters or 1 tablespoon
- **Chopped chili pepper**
50 milliliters or 3 tablespoons

- **Ground turmeric**
1 milliliter or 1/4 teaspoon
- **Salt**
2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon
- **Chopped coriander leaves**
6 centiliters or 1/4 cup

■ Steps

- 1** Marinate the lamb in the yogurt in a noncorrosible bowl overnight in the refrigerator.
- 2** Remove the marinating lamb from the refrigerator 1 hour before beginning step 4.
- 3** Preheat the oven to 200°C or 400°F.
- 4** Soak the saffron in the water.
- 5** Spread the almonds and the cardamom, cumin, and coriander seeds on an oven-proof plate. Bake them in the oven for 10 minutes. (This process enhances their flavor.)
- 6** Heat the ghee in a large, heavy bottomed sauté pan or skillet.
- 7** Sauté the onions for 2 minutes over low heat, stirring frequently. Add the garlic and ginger. Sauté the mixture for 1 minute, stirring frequently.
- 8** Stir in the lamb and its marinade, as well as the saffron and its soaking water. Also stir in the chili pepper, turmeric, salt, and the almonds and spices from step 5.
- 9** Cover the pan. Cook the preparation for 1 1/4 hours over low heat, stirring every 15 minutes.

- 10** Remove the cover and cook the preparation for 30 minutes, or until the sauce has slightly reduced and thickened. Stir frequently.

- 11** Add the coriander leaves. Stir the mixture for 10 seconds. Serve immediately.

Part 2 Cooking tips

■ Pointers

- **Cutting** - If you, rather than the butcher, cube the lamb, cut it from the shank half. And be sure to remove fell, gristle, and surface fat from the meat.
- **Yogurt** - Don't substitute skim-milk yogurt for the whole-milk yogurt.
- **Spices** - If you do not have the whole spices for step 5, use the ground equivalents and roast them for only 5 minutes.
- **Ghee** - If you don't have ghee or clarified butter, substitute 20 milliliters (1 1/2 tablespoons) each of unsalted butter and vegetable oil.
- **Cooking** - Don't let the preparation boil in steps 9 and 10 lest the yogurt curdle and the lamb toughen.
- **Coriander leaves** - If they are unavailable, substitute 30 milliliters or 2 tablespoons of fresh parsley leaves (preferably the flat leaf variety).

■ Serving suggestions

- **Bread** - Kashmirians love to eat their roghan josh with white rice and breads. If you can't buy Indian-style breads, you can serve pita bread.
- **Side dish** - Prepare cooked spinach or other greens.
- **Lasi** - This yogurt drink is a popular accompaniment to roghan josh.
- **Beverage** - Beer is a better beverage choice than wine.

■ Variations

- **Spices** - Experiment with different spices, such as asafetida, and flavoring agents, such as tamarind.
- **Cooking** - Instead of braising the lamb in step 9, cook it uncovered. Add a small quantity of water each time the liquid nearly evaporates.
- **Meat substitution** - Substitute kid or beef for the lamb.

■ Leftovers

- **Storing** - Roghan josh can be made a day ahead of time for a party. An overnight rest in the refrigerator produces subtle flavors.

Part 3

Travelog

One enchanted morning decades ago still lingers in my memory. I was exploring the poplar-lined canals near Kashmir's capital in a small boat, called a shikara, when a flotilla of shallow-bottomed wooden vessels silently appeared out of the mist rising from the still water. They were laden with fruits and vegetables destined for the marketplace and, like my boat, were propelled by poles. Before they completely passed me, I

had purchased from the vendors a variety of freshly harvested foods for my midday meal.

Later that morning my shikara was gliding over the mirror-smooth surface of Dal Lake. I could see reflected in the water snowcapped peaks of the spurs of the mighty Hindu Kush mountains. Periodically my shikara slipped through green patches of flowering white lotuses, all within sight of the Shalimar Gardens.

Moored against a shoreline were a string of for-rent neo-Victorian houseboats with elaborately sculptured details - the Kashmiri wood carvers have stellar reputations. The wall paneling inside these floating palaces was even more ornately chiseled. My boat came with three hospitable staffers: houseboy, chef, and shikara chauffeur.

Near my houseboat a family was busily preparing a wazwan, a thirty-dish feast for the peasant wedding planned that evening. Roghan josh, marinated spiced lamb, was the featured specialty.

Roghan josh is simultaneously a Mogul and a peasant dish because it has its roots in both culinary styles. The Mogul, or court, version is prepared from a more elaborate recipe, but the peasant style roghan josh I tasted at the wedding had more vitality and character.

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