

The Secret is to Take it Slow

Cabrigo is meat from very young, milk fed goats between 4 and 8 weeks of age. The meat is tender, juicy, and very lean and tasty at this age. All parts of a cabrito are utilized, including the innards or organ meats. Today's cabrito is prepared in many ways following diverse recipes with many different added ingredients.

However, the authentic cooking practices are baked or barbecued (asado) or stewed (guisado) with traditional cumin (comino), garlic (ajo), and chile pepper spices.

Traditional Mexican methods of cooking meat are often designed for a cut of meat from an animal that has matured or has done a bit of walking around. In many cases, market goats today are older and larger than true cabritos. Chevon may be a goat from 48 to 60 pounds and 6 to 9 months of age with almost the entire animal being expected to serve the table.

Traditionally, on the day of the pachanga, several cabritos are slaughtered in the very early morning hours. All parts are saved and meat is cut up according to method of preparation - large pieces for asado, small bite-size pieces for guisado. Of course, there are many other dishes, and goat meat is prepared in many different ways with each family adding its own ingredients to a recipe. Women are often the cooks, but men also have their own style and prepare some delicious dishes.

Goat meat is 50%-65% lower in fat than similarly prepared beef, but has a similar protein content. The US department of Agriculture also has reported that saturated fat in cooked goat meat is 40% less than that of chicken, even with the skin removed.

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Palatability and Calories

Panel taste tests rate cabrito and young chevon Spanish goats as being much more acceptable in overall satisfaction than slightly more mature prok, lamb and beef carcasses. "Satisfaction" is a combined impression of flavor, juiciness and tenderness. Older goats are generally tougher and less palatable. Taste tests also indicate that goat meat is unique and is not interchangeable with meat from other species.

A goat carcass contains bone, muscle and fat. Goat muscle meat is the equivalent in caloric value to chicken and has 94 fewer calories than beef per serving. This is desirable for persons with a need to reduce their caloric intake. Overall, goat meat is similar in most nutrients to other species, but the cholesterol content of goat meat is slightly lower than beef or chicken.

Meat Care and Preparation

A cabrito is usually selected, slaughtered and prepared the same day. Retail markets usually sell chevon (older goats). These are sold as entire carcasses, quarters or smaller cuts as customers specify. Since there is no standardized procedure for cutting a goat carcass, many butchers follow the traditional procedure for cutting up lamb carcasses.

Fresh meat should be removed from the market wrapping paper and re-wrapped, unless the meat is to be used the same day it is purchased. Fresh meat should be frozen if it is to be kept for three days or more. Wrap in freezer paper, freeze and store at 0 degrees or lower.

Fresh goat meat should be placed in the coldest part of a refrigerator or in the meat compartment. the frozen food storage of ice cube section of most household refrigerators is not designed for rapid freezing and will not substitute for a home freezer when the meat is to be frozen and stored for longer than one week. Goat meat that has been properly wrapped and promptly frozen at 0 degrees or lower can be kept for 6 to 9 months. cooked goat meat should also be chilled rapidly, covered and stored in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

Goat Meat Cookery

Cabrito will lose moisture and can toughen quickly due to low fat content if it is exposed to high, dry cooking temperatures. Therefore two basic rules are:

- cook it slowly (low temperature)
- cook it with moisture

Tenderness of a meat cut determines the method or methods of cooking. Tender cuts of meat are usually best when cooked by a dry heat method such as roasting, broiling or frying. Less tender cuts are tenderized by cooking with moist heat such as braising and stewing

Tender cuts of goat meat are the legs, ribs, portions of the shoulder cut, the loin roast and the breast. Less tender cuts of goat are stew meat, riblets and shanks. In general, it is advisable to cook the meat slowly. Cooking any meat at low temperatures results in more tender and flavorful product with more juice.

USDA Tips for Cooking Goat

Goat is produced from animals less than a year old. Since the quality of goat varies according to the age of the animal, it is advisable to buy goat that has been USDA graded.

USDA Prime: Prime grade goat is very high in tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. It has moderate marbling, which enhances both flavor and juiciness. Prime chops and roasts are excellent for dry-heat cooking (broiling and roasting).

USDA Choice: Choice grade goat has slightly less marbling than Prime, but still is of very high quality. Choice chops and roasts also are very tender, juicy, and flavorful and suited to dry-heat cooking.

Lower grades of goat and mutton (USDA Good, Utility, and Cull) are seldom marked with the grade if sold at retail. Most cuts of USDA Prime and Choice goat - including shoulder cuts - are tender and can be oven roasted, broiled, or pan broiled. A leg of goat graded Choice or Prime, for example, is delectable when

oven roasted. The less tender cuts - the breast, riblets, neck, and shank - can be braised slowly to make excellent (and tender) goat dishes. Meat from older sheep is called yearling mutton or mutton and, if it is graded, these words will be stamped on the meat along with the shield-shaped

grade mark. Grades for yearling mutton and mutton are the same as for goat, except that mutton does not qualify for the Prime grade and the Cull grade applies only to mutton.

The best way to identify goat cuts is with the goat carcass chart shown above. These terms are generally recognized throughout the meat industry.

Goat Cooking Tips

There are two general methods used for cooking goat: dry heat and moist heat. In dry heat cooking (grilling, rotisserie, broiling, roasting, sautéing, pan-frying), the goat meat is in direct contact with a hot surface or close to the heat source. High heat is used to quickly brown the surface and any additional cooking is at a somewhat lower temperature. This method works best for tender goat cuts, although tougher goat cuts, which have been tenderized (with a marinade), can be cooked successfully with dry heat.

With moist heat methods (braising and stewing), the goat meat is cooked in contact with hot liquid, usually at a low temperature. The hot liquid tenderizes the goat meat and it also acts as a flavoring source. Moist heat methods are usually used on tougher cuts, such as goat shoulder or goat shank because these generally are more flavorful than the popular cuts and simply require a slower cooking method. However moist heat methods may also be used, with care, for tender goat cuts, such as cuts from the goat leg.

Grilling and Broiling Goat

Grilling is a dry heat method that is the most popular cooking technique for goat. The grilling cooking method cooks goat with a high heat source, either directly, indirectly, or with a combination of both. It is essentially the same technique as broiling except that when grilling, the food is cooked above the heat source and with broiling; the food is cooked below the heat source. Because of its natural tenderness, goat is ideal for grilling.

Meat for grilling or broiling goat should be tender, fairly lean, and not too thick, since it needs to cook quickly. Goat cuts that are perfect choices for grilling or broiling goat include Butterflied leg of goat, goat chops, goat steaks, goat tenderloin, goat ribs, goat kebabs, ground goat patties, bone-in leg of goat shoulder, and rack of goat and goat loin roast. Other goat legs to be grilled are often Butterflied, to provide a more uniform thickness. A Butterflied leg is a great grill idea for a crowd.

When grilling or broiling, thinner cuts of goat can be closer to the heat source than thicker goat cuts because the thicker goat cut will require more time to cook. Goat Steaks and Goat Chops need about 5-6 minutes on each side per inch of thickness. Grill goat at least 4" from moderate heat. If a thicker cut of goat is too close to the heat source, the surface will char before the interior is cooked to the proper degree of doneness. When grilling or broiling, cook goat burgers until medium doneness. In either grilling or broiling, goat meat should be turned when it's half-done, using tongs to avoid puncturing the meat. Brush goat shanks with barbecue sauce and wrap in foil to grill. Marinate goat in the refrigerator. Marinades should be used only once and discarded.

Roasting Goat

Roasting is a dry heat method that may use a small amount of fat or oil as a baste. The goat meat is cooked in an oven or on a rotating spit over a fire, gas flame or electric grill bars. Some goat meat cuts suit high temperature roasting while others are better roasted at low temperatures. Leg of goat is best roasted at low to moderate temperatures. This results in less shrinkage and better serving yields.

Goat chops and frenched rack of goat are better rare-roasted at higher temperatures, or first seared then roasted. Slow roast: low temperature, under 325°F (but no less than 212°F) Moderate roasting temperature, 350°F to 375°F Fast roast: high temperature, 400°F or over Sear then roast: brush lean surfaces with oil. Brown goat meat all over in a hot, dry pan then transfer to moderate oven, 350°F, to complete cooking If possible, take goat meat from refrigerator about 30 minutes before cooking. Sear or brown rack of goat and goat chops first. Pre-searing a roasting goat cut in a hot pan improves colour and flavour, particularly when using small, very lean goat cuts that need only short cooking. Roast on a goat rack. When practical, place goat on a rack to roast. This allows even heat circulation and browning. Netting and trussing. Netting or twine may be used to hold plain or filled leg of goat cuts in an even shape for cooking, portioning and carving. Roasting goat at moderate heat maximizes juiciness and minimizes shrinkage. Goat leg roasts are often cooked this way.

Roasting goat at high heat for the entire cooking time maximizes the brown crusty surface, but this method shouldn't be used on large pieces of goat because the surface will dry out and may burn before the interior is done. Resting after roasting. After cooking, before carving or serving goat, allow goat meat to rest, approximately five minutes for every pound of meat. For example: 15 minutes for a 3 pound leg of goat roast. Resting enables temperature to even out, the meat fibres to relax and re-absorb some of the juices. The relaxed goat meat becomes more tender and easier to carve with less loss of juices. An alternative method for roasting goat is to begin with a temperature of 425°F - 450°F for an initial 10 - 15 minutes to brown the goat meat and then continue cooking at 325°F to the desired doneness.

To prevent lean goat cuts from drying out while cooking, the goat meat may be rubbed with oil prior to roasting and/or basted with pan juices during roasting. Utilize a meat thermometer to make sure a goat roast has reached a particular stage of doneness. Insert the meat thermometer into the meatiest part of the goat, not into fat or against bone.

Although the fat keeps the goat meat moist and tender during the roasting process, it can be trimmed before serving because it is not very flavorful and is actually quite unpleasant after it has cooled. Tougher goat cuts from the goat shoulder should be braised or roasted.

Rotisserie Goat

Rotisserie is a dry heat method that is a long slow process, which allows the fat in the goat meat to melt slowly slow cooking process. Cuts of goat that have a basic cylindrical shape and a fairly even distribution of weight are suitable for cooking on a rotisserie. Good choices include leg of goat, rolled goat shoulder, and whole goat.

For rotisserie cooking, choose only compact, cylindrical goat roasts for best results.

Sautéing Goat

Sautéing is a dry heat method cooking thin cuts of goat in a small quantity of hot fat in an uncovered pan. Sautéing differs from frying in that less fat is used. It is actually the same process as searing except that sautéing completely cooks the goat meat and searing is simply a means to brown the goat meat so that the cooking process can be completed with another method (usually when cooking thicker goat cuts). Sautéing is a simple and quick cooking method for small goat cuts in a pan containing seasoning, and a small amount of oil, fat or butter.

Always preheat your pan. Keep goat medium rare for the most tender moist cut. Goat for sautéing should be tender and not more than an inch thick. When sautéing goat, it is important that the meat surface is dry so that when it is placed into the pan, it browns rather than steams. When sautéing goat, the pan should not be crowded; cook in small batches if necessary. Goat chops and goat liver are good choices for sautéing.

Pan-Frying Goat

Pan-frying is similar to sautéing with a few exceptions: more oil is used; the cuts of goat do not have to be thin; and the cooking process requires more time than sautéing. Pan-frying is a perfect method for cooking small, tender goat such as goat chops, ground goat patties, and goat steaks.

The goal of pan-frying is to produce goat meat that has a brown, crispy surface with tender, juicy, and flavorful goat meat inside. A large, well-seasoned, cast-iron skillet works well or a heavy nonstick pan may be used.

The skillet used for pan-frying should have a heavy bottom so that heat will be conducted more easily. Make sure the pan is of adequate size so that there is plenty of room for the goat meat to brown.

Following the same basic steps as sautéing, the skillet should be preheated over medium-high heat. Oil is added to the heated pan in a quantity great enough to well coat the pan (less oil is used when sautéing).

Like sautéing, high heat is used to sear the goat meat to create a flavorful browned crust. The goat meat should be patted with paper towels to remove excess moisture. Unlike sautéing, the goat can be turned more than once (after the goat meat is seared) because the pieces are larger and require a longer cooking time. Tongs or spatulas are the best instruments to use. Goat blade, arm, or loin goat chops up to an inch thick are good choices for panfrying.

Braising/Stewing Goat

Braising and stewing goat involve the slow cooking of meat in a liquid. This cooking method tenderizes and softens tough goat cuts and allows for rich and subtle blending of the goat meat flavors with those of the liquid and seasonings. The main differences between braising and stewing goat are: The size of the goat meat used: Braising requires the use of whole, market ready goat cuts while the stewing process requires that small pieces of goat meat be used.

The quantity of liquid: Braising requires that the level of the liquid be halfway up the side of the goat meat while stewing requires the pieces of goat meat to be totally immersed in the liquid.

Braising Goat

Braising is a moist cooking method where goat cuts are browned and involve the slow cooking of a goat meat in liquid. The technique for braising ready cuts of goat is also known as pot roasting. Braising tenderizes and softens firm or tough goat cuts and allows for rich and subtle blending of the meat flavors with those of the liquid and seasonings. Braising is the perfect cooking method for tougher cuts of goat such as neck slices, goat shoulder cuts, goat riblets, goat shanks, goat flanks, goat breasts and a wide variety of goat dishes.

Braising is the preferred method for cooking tougher cuts of goat. Goat cuts that are braised are always cooked until well done because moist heat cooking methods permeate the goat meat with hot liquid and high temperatures, creating tender and flavorful meat. However, braised goat dishes can be overcooked in spite of the moist heat cooking method.

Tender cuts from the goat loin and goat rib should always be reserved for dry heat cooking methods.

Stewing Goat

Stewing Goat is a moist cooking method where dishes are often prepared with tougher cuts of goat that have been cut in small pieces. Also, stewing is a technique where small meat pieces are cooked gently in liquid to completely cover the meat and vegetables, if desired. There are many variations of goat stew including recipes that are basically the same as beef stew except that goat is used instead of beef.

Other types of goat stew include a variety of goat dishes native to the Mediterranean and Middle East. Many of the same goat cuts that are suitable for braising are ideal as goat stew meat. Stewing tenderizes the goat meat and allows the flavors of the ingredients to blend. When stewing, cuts from the goat shoulder and goat flank are often used as well as other meat from the goat.

Seasonings Suggestions for Goat

Suggest easy marinades for goat such as Italian salad dressing. Goat seasoning favorites include: garlic, oregano, basil, mint, thyme, rosemary, cumin. Lemon pepper and seasoned salt are especially easy seasonings for grilled goat.

Insert quartered garlic cloves in goat roasts before cooking. Soak favorite herbs or hickory chips in water and place on coals while grilling goat. Glaze goat with fruit preserves the last 30 minutes of grilling or roasting. Goat works well with oriental sauces including sweet and sour.