

Just a taste

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Niagara vineyard's lamb is a rare treat

If you've wondered about the flock of sheep roaming the hilly vineyards at Featherstone Winery in Vineland — well, they were working.

Sheep, it seems, love grape vine leaves but like you and I, they don't like unripened grapes. Knowing this, winery owner and winemaker Dave Johnson uses sheep to do the job of plucking leaves from the bottom of the vines. With the leaves gone, the grapes are exposed to the full extent of the sun, ripening them perfectly for harvest.

The sheep are well fed, they help fertilize the vineyard and get to roam freely in a vineyard, protected from predators or from wandering off by an electric fence. So what happens when their job is done? They end up being harvested and sold. It's the cycle of life.

Niagara lamb is difficult to find, but when you do find it I advise you to buy all you can. It's a real treat with its delicate flavour and succulent tender texture. Check the Niagara Culinary Trail website www.NiagaraCulinaryTrail.com for sources of local lamb or e-mail them because there are more sources than what's on their map.

So what does one do with an entire lamb? Well, 10 friends, a few bottles of wine, two kettle grills and a casual

evening were the perfect ingredients to celebrate Niagara's great foods. On the way back from Featherstone Winery I picked up fresh corn on the cob from Inn the Pines market along with fresh potatoes and onions.

A lamb shoulder and leg were barbecued in two kettle grills. Cameron prepared a mixture of Dijon mustard, garlic, olive oil and red wine that was basted over the lamb snuggled deep in the hot coals. It took a mere hour and a half to cook to pink perfection. At the very end, it was deglazed with red wine to remove any fats and grease that had accumulated on the surface.

We took advantage of the hot coals and barbecued the corn.

The potatoes were sliced along with the onions, seasoned



Although it is difficult to find, Niagara lamb's delicate flavour and succulent tender texture make the search worthwhile.

JON OGRYZLO PHOTO

and wrapped in aluminum foil and laid to rest on the hot coals next to the corn.

Cameron did the honours of carving the lamb and we all sat down to a very casual but amazingly delicious Niagara dinner. The lamb was fork tender, a little lighter in colour and leaner than traditional lamb, but chock full of juicy, sweet, succulent flavour — the best we'd ever had!

My laundry basket on wheels was lined with a plastic gar-

bage bag and was pushed around the table as guests peeled back the husks from their barbecued corn and discarded them into the portable bin. Gobs of fresh basil butter were smeared over the ultra sweet corn that had been picked earlier that day.

Of course the entire meal was washed down with some delicious Niagara wines and dessert was a giant bowl of peaches, Italian plums, nectarines and pears from the neighboring orchards.

Vineyard Leg of Lamb

This is a recipe from my new cookbook, *Niagara Cooks*. It's an easy recipe that complements Niagara vineyard lamb beautifully.

- 1 7 pound (3.18 kg) Niagara leg of lamb
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary, destemmed
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) Kitting Ridge Niagara Bench Small Cask Brandy, Vineyard Series
- salt and freshly cracked black pepper
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) Ontario pinot noir

Using a knife, make small slits all over the lamb and insert garlic slivers and rosemary leaves. Soak a cheesecloth or tea towel in brandy and wrap around lamb. Cover with plastic wrap and marinate, refrigerate for 4 hours.

When ready to cook, preheat oven to 450 F (230 C). Unwrap the lamb and place fat side up on a roasting rack in a roasting pan. Season with salt and pepper. Roast for 30 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 F (180 C).

Using a basting brush, baste lamb with wine. Continue to roast, basting frequently for 1 hour or until done. Let stand 10 minutes before carving.

Serves 6 to 8

Lynn Ogryzlo is food and wine writer for Niagara this Week, Niagara Life Magazine, author of Niagara Cooks, a farm to table cookbook and culinary host of CHCH TV Niagara Express airing Sundays at 7 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.