



# Handling, Using & Storing Lamb

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*Michigan-raised lamb is available year-round.*

## Recommendations:

When purchasing lamb choose firm and red cuts with a smooth, velvety texture. Look for cuts that have small flecks of fat within the muscle, which is known as “marbling.” Some marbling is desirable because it provides flavor and tenderness. All lamb sold in retail stores must have a seal from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that shows it was “Passed and Inspected by USDA.” This seal certifies the meat was inspected, and is wholesome and free from disease. (USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, 2013, August).

## Storage & Food Safety:

- To prevent cross-contamination, in the grocery cart or in your refrigerator, always place packaged lamb in plastic bags to avoid juices from leaking or dripping on to other food items.
- Place raw lamb in a cooler on ice if the estimated trip from the market to your refrigerator lasts more than one hour; this is especially important in warm weather.
- Raw lamb should be stored in a bowl or on a platter in the bottom of the refrigerator. Your refrigerator temperature should be at 40 °F or less.
- Always wash cutting boards, utensils and surfaces that have touched raw meat with hot, soapy water and then sanitize with 1 teaspoon of regular bleach in 1 quart of warm water.
- Use or freeze products with a “sell by” date within three to five days of purchase.
- Ground lamb may be refrigerated for one to two days after purchase.
- Cooked lamb should be consumed within three to four days after cooking or frozen for up to three months.
- Washing meat before cooking it is not recommended. This can cause cross-contamination in which bacteria in raw meat can spread to other foods, utensils and surfaces.



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### Thawing:

*Always* thaw meats in the refrigerator, microwave or in cold water. Never thaw meat on the counter. It is best to plan ahead for slow, safe thawing in the refrigerator. Small pieces of meat should defrost within one to two days. Large items will take longer, approximately one day for every 5 pounds of weight. Use thawed lamb within five days. When defrosting meat in the microwave, cook it immediately after thawing because some areas of the food may become warm and begin to cook during microwaving. For fast thawing, place lamb in a leakproof plastic bag and immerse it in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes to be sure it stays cold. After thawing, cook immediately. Although lamb can be cooked while it is still frozen, it will take approximately one and a half times longer to cook.

### Marinating:

*Always* marinate meat in the refrigerator. If you intend to use some of the marinade as a sauce on the cooked food, set some aside in the refrigerator *before* adding it to the raw meat. Do not use marinade from raw meat unless you boil

it for several minutes to destroy any harmful bacteria from the raw meat. Discard the marinade after cooking the meat and do not save it for future use.

### Cooking:

Research indicates that color and texture are not safe ways of determining the doneness of lamb products. Use a food thermometer to make sure the lamb has reached the correct temperature. The USDA recommends chops, roasts and legs be cooked to a minimum 145 °F and then rested 3 minutes after cooking. Resting the meat means letting it sit for a given time before eating it. Ground lamb should reach an internal temperature of 160 °F (USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, 2012, June).

Dry heat cookery methods including grilling, broiling, roasting, pan broiling and pan frying are ideal for more tender cuts of meat. Moist-heat cookery includes adding moisture and using methods such as braising or cooking with liquid such as in stews and soups. Moist-heat cookery is ideal for less tender cuts of meat that require long and slow cooking. Different cuts have different preferred methods of cooking (Table 1).

**Table 1. Approximate 3 ounce serving size of cooked\* lamb and preferred cooking method for various cuts of lamb.**

Type of Cut	Approximate Servings Per Pound of Raw Meat**	Preferred Preparation / Cookery Method***
Lamb Leg, bone in	3	Roast / Dry
Lamb Leg, boneless	4	Roast / Dry
Shoulder Roast, bone in	2.5	Roast/ Dry
Shoulder Steak, bone in	3	Grill / Dry
Lamb Crown Rib Roast or Rack of Lamb	3	Roast / Dry
Chops, Rib or Loin	3	Grill or Broil / Dry
Ground Lamb	4	Broil or Grill / Dry
Stew meat pieces	4	Braise or Stew / Moist
Shanks	3	Braise / Moist

\* One pound of raw, boneless lamb equals approximately 12 ounces of cooked lamb.

\*\* Adapted from Burson (1989)

\*\*\* Adapted from American lamb: Lamb 101 (2014)

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### Freezing:

Freezing keeps food safe almost indefinitely. The following recommended USDA storage times are for quality of frozen lamb. The freezer storage time for uncooked whole pieces of lamb, such as roasts, steaks and chops, is six to nine months. Freezer storage time for uncooked ground lamb is three to four months.

To prepare lamb for the freezer, wrap with aluminum foil, freezer paper or freezer bags. Seal the packaging well to keep air out and moisture in. Vacuum packaging with home vacuum packagers is also a good choice for packaging. Portioning the lamb makes for easy meal planning. Always label and date the packaging.

### Canning:

You can use a pressure canner to preserve meats. Please read the National Center for Home Food Preservation's [Preserving Food: Using Pressure Canners](#) before beginning. If this is your first time canning, also read the USDA's [Principles of Home Canning](#).

### Procedure:

Choose quality chilled meat. Remove excess fat and large bones.

**Hot pack** – Precook meat until rare by roasting, stewing or browning in a small amount of fat. Add 1 teaspoon of salt per quart to the jar, if desired. Fill jars with uniform pieces of meat and add boiling broth, meat drippings, water or tomato juice, leaving 1-inch headspace.

**Raw pack** – Add 2 teaspoons of salt per quart to the jar, if desired. Fill jars with uniform pieces of raw meat, leaving 1-inch headspace. Do not add liquid.

Adjust lids and process following the recommendations in Table 2 or Table 3 according to the canning method used.

Information on canning (including tables 2 and 3) was adapted from the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at [http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_05/strips\\_cubes\\_chunks.html#TBLE2](http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_05/strips_cubes_chunks.html#TBLE2). The National Center for Home Food Preservation adapted their information from the “Complete Guide to Home Canning,” Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 539, USDA, revised 2009.

**Table 2 Recommended process time for Strips, Cubes, or Chunks of Meat in a dial-gauge pressure canner.**

Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time (min)	Canner Pressure (PSI) in pounds at Altitudes of			
			0 - 2,000 ft	2,001 - 4,000 ft	4,001 - 6,000 ft	6,001 - 8,000 ft
Hot and Raw	Pints	75	11	12	13	14
	Quarts	90	11	12	13	14

**Table 3. Recommended process time for Strips, Cubes, or Chunks of Meat in a weighted-gauge pressure canner.**

Style of Pack	Jar Size	Process Time (min)	Canner Pressure (PSI) in pounds at Altitudes of	
			0 - 1,000 ft	Above 1,000 ft
Hot and Raw	Pints	75	10	15
	Quarts	90	10	15

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### References:

*American lamb: Lamb 101*. (2014). Denver, CO: American Lamb Board. Retrieved from [www.americanlamb.com/lamb-101/](http://www.americanlamb.com/lamb-101/)

Burson, D. E. (1989). G89-947 Buying meat by the serving. *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska Lincoln-Extension*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1790&context=extensionhist>

National Center for Home Food Preservation. (2009, Nov.). *Selecting, preparing and canning meat*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia. Retrieved from [http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can\\_05/strips\\_cubes\\_chunks.html#TBLE2](http://nchfp.uga.edu/how/can_05/strips_cubes_chunks.html#TBLE2)

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2012, June). *Safe minimum internal temperature chart*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/625d9435-4f14-46fe-b207-5d6688cb4db5/Safe\\_Minimum\\_Internal\\_Temperature\\_Chart.pdf?MOD=AJPERES](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/wcm/connect/625d9435-4f14-46fe-b207-5d6688cb4db5/Safe_Minimum_Internal_Temperature_Chart.pdf?MOD=AJPERES)

USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2013, August). *Lamb from farm to table*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from [www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/meat-preparation/focus-on-lambfrom-farm-to-table/CT\\_Index](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/meat-preparation/focus-on-lambfrom-farm-to-table/CT_Index)

### Resources:

*American lamb: Lamb 101*. (2014). Denver, CO: American Lamb Board. Retrieved from [www.americanlamb.com/lamb-101/](http://www.americanlamb.com/lamb-101/)

National Center for Home Food Preservation <http://nchfp.uga.edu/>

Recipetips.com Lamb Shopping Guide: [www.recipetips.com/kitchen-tips/t--476/lamb-shopping-guide.asp](http://www.recipetips.com/kitchen-tips/t--476/lamb-shopping-guide.asp)

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Find out more about Michigan Fresh at [msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/mi\\_fresh](http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/mi_fresh).