Babich Christmas Roast Lamb on a Spit

BABICH
NEW ZEALAND WINE
SINCE 1916

For decades, a whole lamb on the spit has been part of the Babich family's holiday celebrations, a tradition rooted in our Croatian heritage. Joe Babich preferred coals for their smoky flavour. Peter Babich preferred gas for its convenience and control. These days, gas usually wins out, with garlic tucked into the meat, rosemary and onions inside, and a wine baste brushed on throughout. We still give it around five and a half hours. Some family traditions deserve a little patience.

Cooking: approximately 5 ½ hours (depending on lamb size and equipment)

Resting: 20-30 minutes

Ingredients

- **Whole lamb:** approximately 12-15kg (26 ½ - 33 lb), dressed and prepared by your butcher for spit roasting
- **Garlic:** 4 bulbs: separate and peel the cloves from 2 bulbs, leaving the other 2 bulbs whole
- **Onions:** 3 large brown onions, peeled and quartered
- **Rosemary:** 1 generous bunch, reserving 2 tablespoons (30ml) of chopped leaves for the baste and some sprigs for the cavity
- **Fine salt:** approximately 120 - 150g (4 ¼ - 5 ¼ oz), allowing 10g per kilogram of lamb; divide between the cavity, exterior and reserve 5g (0.18oz) for the baste
- **Wine:** 1 bottle of Babich Marlborough Pinot Noir, 750ml (25 ½ US fl oz), with an extra available if needed
- **Dried mixed herbs:** 1 tablespoon (15 ml)

Equipment

- A motorised outdoor spit suitable for the lamb's weight and length, with matching forks, spine brace and leg restraints
- Enough gas for the full cook, or charcoal and lighting equipment for a charcoal spit
- Food-safe stainless steel trussing wire, or butcher's twine and a trussing needle
- A large food-safe preparation surface, carving tray, small sharp knife, carving knife and fork
- A bowl or jug and long-handled basting brush
- A meat thermometer, heat resistant gloves and foil
- Another pair of hands for mounting and lifting the lamb

Cooking steps

1. Prepare the spit

Keep the lamb refrigerated until preparation. Set up the spit outdoors on stable ground, following the equipment instructions.

Preheat the gas spit to its recommended roasting setting. For charcoal, establish an even bed of glowing coals without direct flames.

2. Add the garlic

Pat the lamb dry. Make small incisions in the shoulders and rump, pushing a peeled garlic clove into each. Keep the cuts just large enough to hold the cloves.

3. Season the cavity

Reserve 5g (0.18oz) of salt for the baste. Rub approximately 60 – 75g (2 ⅛ – 2 ⅝ oz) inside the chest and abdominal cavity.

Add the onions, whole garlic bulbs and rosemary sprigs. Leave some space rather than packing the cavity tightly.

4. Secure the lamb

Mount and balance the lamb using the spit's forks, spine brace and leg restraints, following the equipment instructions. Close the cavity with food-safe trussing wire or butcher's twine.

Secure loose limbs and check the lamb turns smoothly without slipping. Season the outside with the remaining salt.

5. Mix the baste

Combine the wine, chopped rosemary, mixed herbs and reserved 5g (0.18oz) of salt in a bowl or jug. Stir before each use.

6. Roast and baste

Keep the lamb turning continuously over steady heat, brushing lightly with the baste every 20-30 minutes. Adjust the heat or spit height if it browns too quickly and manage any flare-ups.

We usually aim for around 5 ½ hours. Allow longer if needed for the lamb's size, equipment or weather.

7. Check the temperature

Check the thickest parts of both shoulders and hind legs with a meat thermometer, avoiding bone and the spit rod. Each point checked should reach between **63°C - 71°C (143°F - 160°F) for 30 seconds** for medium.

Check tenderness too, and continue cooking if necessary. Use temperature rather than time or colour alone to judge when it is ready.

8. Rest and carve

With help and heat-resistant gloves, transfer the lamb to a clean carving tray. Cover loosely with foil and rest for 20-30 minutes.

Remove all fixings, wire and twine before carving. Discard the cavity aromatics and leftover baste, then serve on warm platters with your chosen sides.