

# A Tuscan Easter Dinner

A whole roasted leg of lamb is paired with fava-bean crostini, sautéed artichokes, and other signs of spring.

Serves Eight.

To serve eight with this menu, you'll need to double the artichoke and peas dish. The shopping list already reflects the scaled-up amounts.



In Tuscany, a whole roast leg of lamb is the traditional centerpiece of an Easter feast. Here it's paired with favorite regional flavor combinations: a dried-cherry crust, and a side dish of roasted fennel and potatoes. The menu is completed with other signs of spring served Italian-style: a rustic fava bean purée on crostini, a prosciutto-studded sauté of artichokes and peas, and sweet strawberries topped with creamy balsamic sabayon.

## the menu

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**Fava Bean Purée**

**Crostini**

**Roasted Leg of Lamb with Dried Cherry,  
Mustard & Herb Crust**

**Fennel Layered with Potatoes & Breadcrumbs  
(Tortiera di Finocchi e Patate)**

**Artichokes with Peas & Prosciutto**

**Strawberries with Balsamic Sabayon**



## SHOPPING LIST

### Fresh Produce

3 lb. fresh fava beans  
8 large artichokes  
2 lb. yellow potatoes, such as Yukon Gold  
1 large fennel bulb  
2 medium carrots  
2 ribs celery  
1 medium yellow onion  
2 small red onion  
1 bunch fresh mint  
1 bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley  
1 bunch fresh rosemary  
1 bunch fresh sage  
2 pints strawberries  
2 lemons

### Meat, Eggs & Dairy:

6- to 7-lb. bone-in leg of lamb  
3 oz. very thinly sliced prosciutto di Parma (about 3 slices)  
1-1/2 cups heavy cream  
4 large eggs  
About 1 oz. pecorino (preferably Tuscan) or Parmigiano-Reggiano (enough for 1/2 cup grated)

### Other Groceries:

2 fresh baguettes  
20 oz. frozen peas  
2 cups (10 to 11 oz.) dried sweet cherries  
1-1/2 cups sweet red vermouth, such as Martini & Rossi  
1-1/2 cups low-salt beef or chicken broth (or use homemade)  
Amaretti, biscotti, or other crisp cookies (optional)

### Pantry Staples:

2-1/4 cups extra-virgin olive oil  
6 Tbs. sugar  
2 Tbs. aged balsamic vinegar  
2 Tbs. Dijon mustard  
Kosher salt  
Black peppercorns



## MENU TIMELINE

### Up to one day ahead:

Make the crostini.  
Make the fava bean purée and refrigerate.

### In the morning:

Rinse and hull the strawberries; slice them if you like.  
Make the sabayon and refrigerate.  
Assemble the fennel/potato casserole.

### Two hours before dinner:

Preheat the oven to 375°F.  
Sear the leg of lamb.  
Make the dried-cherry crust and spread it over the leg of lamb.  
Take the fava purée out of the fridge to come to room temperature.

### 90 minutes before dinner:

Put the lamb and the fennel/potato casserole into the oven to roast. (If you have two ovens, bake the casserole separately at 400°F.)  
Trim the artichokes down to their bottoms and keep them submerged in a bowl of lemon water until ready to cook.

### 40 minutes before dinner:

Cook the artichokes with peas & prosciutto.  
Spoon the fava purée onto crostini, garnish, and serve.

### 20 minutes before dinner:

Remove the lamb from the oven (the fennel may need a few more minutes), tent with foil, and let rest.  
Make the pan sauce for the lamb.  
Carve the lamb and serve the meal.

### After dinner:

Divide the strawberries into dessert glasses or bowls, spoon the sabayon over them, garnish and serve.

## Fava Bean Purée

by Ruth Lively

This purée is terrific on crostini, but you can also use it as a dip for vegetables, pita chips, or bread. Like other starchy purées, this will stiffen a bit after it sits, so if using as a dip, you may want to add a little extra olive oil or lemon juice, or just a spoonful of water to loosen it. The purée will keep in the fridge for up to 3 days.

*Yields about 1-1/2 cups.*

### ingredients

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling  
2 large cloves garlic, chopped  
1 tsp. finely chopped fresh rosemary or thyme  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
3 lb. fava beans, shelled and peeled (see directions in the article  
“Fresh Favas”) to yield 2 cups  
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice; more to taste

### how to make

Put a 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1/4 cup of the oil, the garlic, rosemary or thyme, 1/2 tsp. salt, and 1/8 tsp. pepper and cook until you begin to hear a sizzling sound and the aromatics are fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the fava beans. Stir until the beans are well coated with the oil and aromatics and then add 1 cup of water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, and cook until the water has nearly evaporated and the fava beans are tender, about 12 minutes. Add more water if the pan looks dry before the favas are done. Remove from the heat.

Transfer the fava mixture to a food processor. Add the remaining 1/4 cup olive oil and the lemon juice and purée until smooth, stopping to scrape the bowl as needed. Season to taste with more salt and lemon juice. Drizzle with a little olive oil before serving.



photo: Scott Phillips

## Crostini

by Tony Rosenfeld

Use these toasted baguette rounds as a base for the fava bean purée.

*Yields 16 crostini.*

### ingredients

16 baguette slices, between 1/4 and 1/2 inch thick (from about 1/2 baguette)  
2 cloves garlic, cut in half  
2 to 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil  
Kosher salt

### how to make

Adjust an oven rack to 6 inches from the broiler and turn the broiler on to high. Rub one side of each bread slice with the garlic and set on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. Brush the garlic side with the oil and season with salt. Broil until the bread is browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Flip and broil the other side 1 minute more. Spread with your choice of crostini toppings.



photo: Scott Phillips

# Roasted Leg of Lamb with Dried Cherry, Mustard & Herb Crust

by Umberto Menghi

In Tuscany, we traditionally serve a whole roast leg of lamb for spring celebrations: Easter, a wedding engagement, a baptism. The meat is rich and flavorful and, of course, when you roast a whole leg, there's plenty for everyone gathered around the table. This roast is coated with a crust of dried cherries and herbs that's a delicious complement to the flavor of the meat.

Serves eight to ten.

## ingredients

6- to 7-lb. bone-in leg of lamb  
4 cloves garlic, cut lengthwise into quarters  
Kosher salt  
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
2 cups (10 to 11 oz.) dried sweet cherries, soaked in 1 cup hot water for 30 minutes  
1/2 cup (1 oz.) fresh white breadcrumbs  
2 Tbs. Dijon mustard  
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh rosemary  
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh sage  
1 tsp. freshly cracked black pepper  
2 medium carrots, peeled, halved lengthwise, and cut into 2-inch lengths  
2 ribs celery, halved lengthwise and cut into 2-inch lengths  
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and quartered  
1-1/2 cups sweet red vermouth, such as Martini & Rossi  
1-1/2 cups homemade or low-salt beef or chicken broth

## how to make

Position a rack in the lower middle of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. Trim any excess fat from the lamb. With the point of a knife, make 16 slits all over the lamb and insert a sliver of garlic into each slit. Sprinkle 1 tsp. salt over the meat.

Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat 2 Tbs. of the oil in a large, heavy flameproof roasting pan over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, sear the roast until browned lightly on at least the two widest sides. Transfer the meat to a tray or platter and then carefully pour the hot fat out of the pan.

Put the dried cherries with their soaking liquid, the breadcrumbs, mustard, rosemary, sage, 1 tsp. salt, the pepper, and the remaining 2 Tbs. oil in a food processor and pulse to make a coarse, wet paste. Scatter the carrots, celery, and onion in the roasting pan to make a bed for the lamb. Put about a third of the cherry paste onto the bottom of the roast (the wide side closest to the bone). Set the roast bottom side down on the vegetables. Pat the remaining paste evenly on the rest of the lamb. Put the pan in the oven and set a timer for 25 min.

After 25 min., lower the heat to 375°F and roast until the temperature at the thickest part of the meat is 125° to 130°F for medium rare, another 35 to 45 min. (or longer if you prefer medium or well-done lamb). Check the roast periodically to be sure the



photo: Scott Phillips

**TIP:** Choose a whole leg of lamb covered with firm, creamy-white fat. (Crumbly, brittle, yellowish fat is a sign of age.) Before you take the leg home, ask the butcher to trim off most of the visible fat, but to leave the shank end on.

cherry crust isn't getting too dark; if it is, drape a piece of foil loosely over the lamb. Transfer the meat to a carving board or serving platter. Cover the lamb with a sheet of aluminum foil (not too tight, or the meat will steam) and let rest for 10 min.

Meanwhile, set the roasting pan over two burners on medium high, leaving the carrots, celery, onion and any fallen-off crust in the pan. Add the sweet vermouth and broth. Stir and scrape the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon and let the liquid simmer until it reduces to about 1 cup of slightly thickened sauce, 8 to 10 min. Season the sauce with salt and pepper to taste. Pour the sauce through a fine sieve into a serving bowl. Stir and gently press on the solids in the sieve to free the sauce, but don't break up the solids or force them through the sieve. Discard the solids.

To serve the lamb, carve 1/2-inch slices, discarding the garlic pieces as you come across them. Some of the flavorful crust will fall off while you carve—just spoon it up and serve it alongside the meat. Arrange the sliced lamb on a large serving platter or individual plates and drizzle with the sauce.

## Fennel Layered with Potatoes & Breadcrumbs (Tortiera di Finocchi e Patate)

by Janet Fletcher, Rosetta Costantino

Take care to make the potato slices equally thin so they cook evenly. A mandoline or other vegetable slicer makes the job easier, but you can also do it by hand with a sharp knife.

Serves eight.

### ingredients

2 lb. yellow potatoes, such as Yukon Gold  
1 large fennel bulb, trimmed (3/4 to 1 lb. after trimming)  
1 cup firmly packed fresh breadcrumbs  
1/2 cup freshly grated pecorino (preferably Tuscan) or Parmigiano-Reggiano  
3 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
2 medium cloves garlic, minced  
6 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for the baking dish  
2-1/2 tsp. kosher salt  
Freshly ground black pepper

### how to make

Peel the potatoes and slice them as thinly as possible, between 1/16 and 1/8 inch thick (use a mandoline if you have one). Put the sliced potatoes in a large bowl of cold water to keep them from browning.

Cut the fennel in half lengthwise. Slice the halved fennel crosswise as thinly as possible, between 1/16 and 1/8 inch thick. You should have about 4 cups.

In a bowl, combine the breadcrumbs, cheese, parsley, and garlic. Mix well with your hands, making sure the garlic is evenly distributed.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F.

Lightly oil the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking dish.

Without draining the potatoes, use your hands to lift out about one-third of the slices and arrange them in the bottom of the baking dish, overlapping them slightly. (The water clinging to them will generate steam as they bake.) Season with 1/2 tsp. of the salt and a couple of grinds of the pepper. Sprinkle the potatoes evenly with 1/4 cup of the breadcrumb mixture. Drizzle with 1 Tbs. of the oil. Top the potatoes with half of the sliced fennel, spreading it evenly. Sprinkle the fennel with 1/2 tsp. salt, 1/4 cup of the breadcrumb mixture, and 1 Tbs. of the oil. Repeat this layering process, ending with a top layer of potatoes. Season the top layer with the remaining 1/2 tsp. salt and some more pepper. Top with the remaining breadcrumb mixture and the final 2 Tbs. oil.

Cover the dish tightly with aluminum foil and bake for 40 minutes (be sure the aluminum foil is sealed tightly all around the baking dish, or there won't be enough steam to cook the potatoes). Uncover and continue baking until the potatoes are tender when pierced with a fork and the top is golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes longer. Let rest at least 10 minutes before serving. The tortiera is as good warm as it is hot.



photo: Scott Phillips

**TIP:** To make fresh breadcrumbs, use a dense, day-old French or Italian country-style loaf. Cut the bread into 1-inch cubes and process in a food processor until fine.

## Artichokes with Peas & Prosciutto

by Janet Fletcher

Because fresh, tender peas don't arrive in my local markets until the spring artichoke harvest is winding down, I usually make this dish with frozen peas. If you use fresh peas, they'll need more cooking time and more water than called for below. Add fresh peas to the skillet about 10 minutes after you start the artichokes, along with just enough water to keep them steaming steadily.

*Serves four to six as a side dish.*

### ingredients

3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil  
1 small red onion, minced  
4 large artichoke bottoms, trimmed and halved, in lemon water  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
10 oz. frozen peas, partially thawed  
1-1/2 oz. very thinly sliced prosciutto di Parma (about 2 slices), cut into thin strips  
2 tsp. finely chopped fresh mint

### how to make

Heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over moderately low heat. Add the onion and cook until soft, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, cut each artichoke half into thin wedges (about 6 per half). Return the wedges to the lemon water. When the onion is soft, drain the artichokes and add them to the skillet. Season with salt and pepper and stir to coat them with the fat. Cover and cook until the artichokes are almost tender, 20 to 25 minutes. Check and stir occasionally to be sure they aren't burning or sticking but are steaming steadily; adjust the heat accordingly. If there's any sticking, add a tablespoon or two of water. Add the peas and cover the pot. Cook until the peas are tender, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat; stir in the prosciutto and mint. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve immediately.

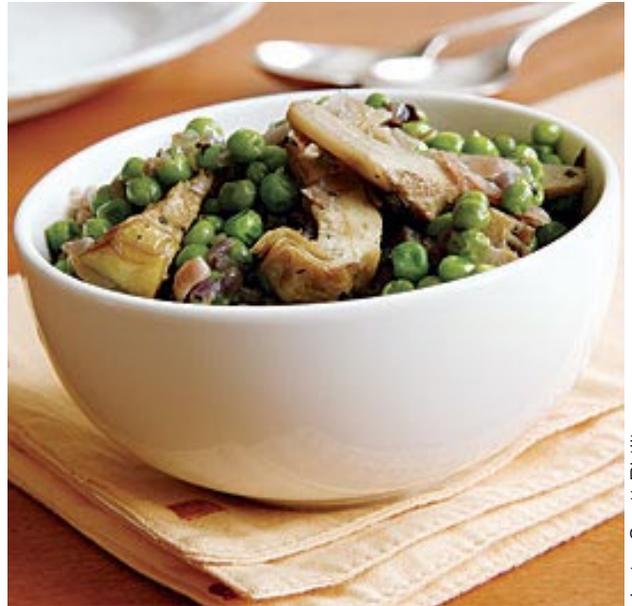


photo: Scott Phillips

## Strawberries with Balsamic Sabayon

by Stephen Durfee

Serve fresh strawberries with this chilled creamy sabayon sauce enhanced with balsamic vinegar. The sauce will taste complex and delicious with a really good quality aged balsamic, but it's wonderful as well when made with a more ordinary balsamic.

Serves eight.

### ingredients

6 Tbs. sugar  
4 egg yolks  
2 Tbs. aged balsamic vinegar  
1-1/2 cups heavy cream, whipped to medium-stiff peaks and refrigerated  
2 pints strawberries, rinsed and hulled  
Amaretti, biscotti, or other crisp cookies for garnish (optional)

### how to make

Fill a large bowl with ice. In a small stainless-steel bowl, whisk the sugar into the egg yolks until thoroughly combined and lightened in color. Set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water and continue whisking the mixture until it thickens. The mixture is cooked when it's light in color and it trails off the whisk in ribbons. Do not overcook it. Remove the bowl from the heat and whisk in the balsamic vinegar. Set the bowl over the bowl of ice and continue whisking the sabayon until it's completely cooled, 5 to 10 minutes. The sabayon will stiffen as it cools. Very gently fold in the whipped cream and refrigerate the lightened sabayon for at least 2 hours before serving. It will hold overnight, but it's best served the day it's made.

Serve the sabayon spooned over whole or sliced strawberries in a pretty glass dish with a garnish of crisp cookies, whole or crumbled, if you like.



photo: Rita Maas