

## SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER DISHES, AND HOW TO PREPARE THEM.



HO is there so lost to taste as not to appreciate the first dish of fresh green peas or new potatoes—genuine healthy-grown ones, not forced, which latter are barely better than those preserved in tins? Then, again, the first piece of bright red salmon, when it is well cooked; or the nicely-browned fore-quarter of lamb, and good wholesome English mint sauce with it—*i.e.*, mint moistened in vinegar, and not a pint of vinegar to a small pinch of mint.

There is some very old riddle about spring being a lamb-on-table season. Whether lamb is really nicer than mutton is a question we will not now discuss; indeed, the question is entirely a matter of taste. There are, however, several little niceties in cooking lamb that inexperienced cooks and housekeepers should bear in mind. One very common fallacy is that lamb, being young and tender, does not require so much cooking as mutton. Such, however, is not the case. Well-cooked mutton, such as a haunch, should be cooked so as to be not exactly red, but very, very near it, and should hold what is called red gravy. Those who have seen a good haunch of mutton well carved will know how the gravy will settle in it after several slices have been taken out. I believe, at some regimental messes many years ago, there used to be a fine for carving a haunch so that this gravy was allowed to run out.

Now, lamb should be cooked thoroughly, and should never even border on being red; underdone lamb is as bad as underdone veal. Of course, lamb bears the same relation to mutton as veal to beef. The climax of mismanagement is graphically expressed in the pathetic appeal of David Copperfield to his poor little child-wife when he said, "You know, my dear, I was made quite unwell the other day by being obliged to eat underdone veal in a hurry."

Another point to be remembered in connection with lamb is the gravy. A roast fore-quarter of lamb will not make the gravy that a sirloin of beef or haunch of mutton will.

Now, I dare say there are many persons who really do not know where the gravy comes from that usually surrounds a sirloin of beef; and as these articles are intended to instruct absolute novices, I will describe the process, reminding those who may think anything so simple unworthy of explanation, that even royalty some years back is reported to have puzzled over the intricate problem as to how the apples got into the dumpling.

We will suppose the beef to have been hanging on the spit a sufficient time, and the cook has arrived at the critical moment called dishing-up. Of course, under the meat to catch the fat, &c., that drops, has been placed that large tin vessel with a well in the centre called a dripping-pan, which will be found to

contain a pint or quart (according to the size of the joint) of melted fat, or, as it is usually called, dripping. The cook takes this dripping-pan, and carefully and slowly pours off all the fat into a basin; at the bottom of the fat will be found a sediment, brown or red—this is the gravy. Now, the great art is to pour off *all* the fat, and yet to avoid losing any of the gravy. What is requisite is—first, common-sense; secondly, a little experience and a steady hand.

As a rule, it is best to go on pouring till just a little sediment has run with the fat, and then stop. Next take some *boiling* water, about half a pint or a little more, and pour it into the dripping-pan, and stir it about, taking care to scrape those parts where the gravy is dried on and the dripping-pan looks brown; by this means the gravy will not merely look darker, but will be absolutely richer. This must now be poured through a fine strainer over the meat. If the cook sees that the gravy has got a little cold in the operation, of course she would pour it, just as it is, into a saucepan and make it hot, but not let it boil, and then pour it through the strainer over the meat. When the party at dinner is large, and yet the joint is put on the table, it is a very good plan to pour only half the gravy over at first, and to send up the rest hot about ten minutes afterwards, when it can be poured over in the dining-room.

Now, we have said that lamb does not make good gravy; when, therefore, it is possible, get some thin stock, and use that to pour into the dripping-pan instead of boiling water, only take care that the stock is tasteless—anything like rich gravy would destroy the delicate flavour of the lamb.

It should be borne in mind, too, that lamb is one of the few meats that are none the better for keeping; the sooner it is cooked, the nicer will it be. In hot weather, lamb has an unamiable property of getting high sooner than other meat, especially the shoulder. The reason of this is probably that it is "open," and not close meat, like a silverside of beef. A loin of mutton that has been jointed will get bad sooner than one not jointed.

We next come to the general and nicest accompaniment to roast lamb, and that is, nice, fresh, young green peas. When we say fresh, we mean lately gathered. Peas that have been picked some time are very inferior in flavour to those recently picked. Shell the peas, throwing them into cold water just like potatoes after being peeled. Next get a large saucepan of *boiling* water, into which has been placed a tablespoonful of salt, and a very little moist sugar—about a salt-spoonful is sufficient. Strain the peas, and throw them in the boiling water gradually, in order not to take the water off the boil for too long.

The next point to be considered is, why do some people always have peas looking a bright green, and others send them up with a bad colour? The secret of this is—do not cover up the saucepan. Now, as the saucepan is open, if the fire is likewise an open



one, it follows that the fire should be pretty clear, or you will run the risk of having the peas smoky. It will, however, generally be found that the fire, after roasting a joint, is tolerably clear at the finish, especially as lamb requires a *brisk* fire. A few leaves of fresh mint should be boiled with the peas; they (the peas) should be strained off quickly, put into a hot vegetable dish, and sent up to table speedily, as they very soon get cold. I recollect, years ago, that cooks used to put a penny (the old-fashioned copper ones) into the saucepan, the copper being supposed to improve the colour; but the use of copper for the purpose of making vegetables green should be avoided. In the case of bright green pickles, where the colour has been obtained by this means, the result is that a very injurious if not absolutely poisonous compound has been obtained.

Young peas do not require more than a quarter of an hour's boiling; old peas will take half an hour; and when old, a good-sized pinch of carbonate of soda may be put with advantage into the water, to render the water as well as the peas softer.

To say that mint sauce requires mint seems somewhat of a truism; but nevertheless this seems the point generally overlooked, especially at hotels, where the habit seems to be to send up mint in the very smallest possible quantity, and vinegar in exactly opposite proportions. Chop up enough fresh mint to half fill a tea-cup, add about a table-spoonful of moist sugar, about three-parts of a tea-cupful of vinegar, and half a tea-cupful of water. Let the whole stand for a few hours, in order that the flavour of mint may get into the vinegar.

I don't know why, but servants invariably put too much vinegar; as nothing in the world will cure them, it is one of those things which, if it is possible, the mistress of the house should do herself.

New potatoes differ from old in this important respect: in cooking, the latter require cold water; the former, boiling water. In both cases salt must be put in the water, about a table-spoonful to every two quarts. Like peas, new potatoes are best when fresh from the garden. When really young the skin will rub off with a cloth. They vary in the time they take to boil—from a quarter of an hour to twenty-five minutes; but the best plan is to wait a reasonable time, and try one with a fork and see if it is tender, when they should be immediately strained off, as if they are allowed to boil too long they will get pappy. Let them dry in the saucepan, and when dry, put them into the vegetable dish, with either a lump of butter, which will melt and make them look oily; or a little good melted butter made with milk, into which has been put a little finely-chopped parsley, may be poured over each potato. Perhaps the piece of plain butter is best, however.

There are, especially in early spring, a large quantity of potatoes sold that pretend to be new, but are not. What they are, or where they come from (some say Holland), I don't know, but they are not worth eating,

and it is just as well to know it. If anybody who understands the swindle will explain, I should feel much obliged.

To boil fish such as salmon is really very easy, but requires care. The fish must be placed in cold water, to which plenty of salt has been added—about six table-spoonfuls to every gallon of water, or nearly a pound of salt. Take care, also, that the water covers the fish, and that the latter is thoroughly clean. Rub the spine, which is apt to contain little clots of blood, with a lump of salt. Salmon always tastes best when boiled whole. When the water boils, take care to remove all the scum that will rise to the surface. As to the time it will take to boil, no time can be given, as this depends more upon the thickness of the fish than the mere weight in pounds. In carving a salmon, be sure to cut it always parallel to the spine, and not transversely.

The best sauce with salmon is, undoubtedly, lobster sauce, the best method of making which I have already described. I would remind you, however, again, that the sauce should look red, owing to the coral having been pounded with some butter and mixed in; also, all the shells and little claws should be broken up and boiled in the milk that will be used for the sauce, in order that the melted butter may be thoroughly impregnated with the flavour of the lobster. In making shrimp sauce, the same theory should be borne in mind. Boil the shrimps' heads, in order that the flavour of the shrimp may be extracted; only, before using this milk to make into melted butter, taste, and see that it is not too salt, as salt is often thrown over shrimps. The melted butter, into which a little lobster coral should have been melted to make a nice colour, should then be poured on to the picked shrimps placed in the hot tureen; but shrimps had better not be boiled after being picked.

When salmon first comes in, it is best to have it boiled; but a very nice way of cooking salmon is to grill it—*i.e.*, do it on the gridiron just like a steak. Of course, the salmon for this purpose must be cut in slices. Great care should be taken that the gridiron is perfectly clean. The slice of salmon can be placed on the gridiron just as it is, but if the fire is nice and clear it will be better to wrap each slice in oiled paper; by this means the flavour of the salmon is kept in. Of course, the cooking must be carefully watched, or the paper will very likely catch fire. The best sauce with grilled salmon is tartare sauce, which may briefly be described as follows:—First make some mayonnaise sauce as thick as butter in summer time, add to it about a tea-spoonful of finely-chopped parsley, chopped on a chopping-board previously rubbed over with a shalot; mix this in with a good-sized tea-spoonful of French mustard flavoured with taragon. The mayonnaise sauce is supposed to contain sufficient vinegar, or *dilute* acetic acid. Grilled salmon is more suitable for three or four persons than for a large party, as few fires are capable of cooking more than two slices at a time, and one slice is only sufficient for two persons.