Main dishes / India

Lamb Rogan Josh

The crown jewel of Kashmiri wazwan cooking — bone-in lamb slow-braised in a brick-red gravy built from Kashmiri chilis, yogurt, and a regiment of whole spices, arriving at the table deeply fragrant and moderately spiced, with a silky, enveloping sauce that coats the meat in shades of rust and crimson.

Time 150 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 800 g Lamb shoulder or neck (bone-in, cut into 5cm pieces)
- ☐ 50 g Ghee (or neutral oil)
- ☐ 12 g Dried Kashmiri chilis (whole, stemmed and seeded)
- ☐ 8 g Kashmiri chili powder (for the gravy base)
- ☐ 2 leaves Bay leaves (Indian tejpatta, or standard bay)
- ☐ 3 pods Black cardamom pods (badi elaichi, cracked)
- ☐ 5 pods Green cardamom pods (hari elaichi, lightly cracked)
- ☐ 5 g Cloves (whole)
- ☐ 8 g Black peppercorns
- ☐ 1 piece Cinnamon stick (5cm piece)
- ☐ 5 g Fennel seeds (saunf)
- ☐ 4 g Dried ginger powder (sonth)
- ☐ 150 g Full-fat yogurt (whisked smooth)
- ☐ 0.5 g Asafoetida (hing, a pinch — traditional Kashmiri Pandit version has no onion or garlic)
- ☐ 200 g Warm water or light stock
- ☐ 8 g Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Heat the ghee in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat until shimmering. Add the whole dried Kashmiri chilis and all the whole spices — bay leaves, both cardamoms, cloves, peppercorns, and cinnamon — along with a pinch of asafoetida if using. Stir and fry for 60 to 90 seconds until the spices swell, the cardamom skins begin to puff slightly, the dried chilis darken, and the ghee runs a deep, reddish-orange from the chili oils. The kitchen should fill with a perfumed, resinous spice aroma — warm, complex, and almost incense-like. This blooming of whole spices in hot fat is called tarka or chaunk and is the structural foundation of the entire dish.

02 Season the lamb pieces with salt. Add them to the pot in the spice-infused ghee and cook over medium-high heat, turning occasionally, until browned on all sides, 8 to 10 minutes. Do not crowd — work in batches if necessary. The red ghee will stain the meat a deep rust color as it browns. The lamb should develop a visible crust on each side; the fond on the pot floor will turn dark and aromatic. This browning step is not about deep Maillard color (the red ghee masks the color development), but about driving off surface moisture and developing body in the eventual sauce.

03 Lower the heat to medium-low. Add the Kashmiri chili powder, fennel seeds, and dried ginger to the pot and stir for 1 minute in the fat around the lamb. Then add the whisked yogurt 2 to 3 tablespoons at a time, stirring vigorously after each addition so the yogurt is fully incorporated into the ghee before the next addition — this prevents the yogurt from curdling into grainy lumps in the hot fat. Add the warm water or stock, stir well, and bring to a gentle simmer. Cover and braise on the lowest heat for 1.5 to 2 hours until the lamb is very tender and pulling away from the bone.

04 Uncover the pot for the last 15 minutes to reduce the sauce slightly and concentrate the flavors. The sauce should be glossy and clingy — if it's too thin, simmer uncovered until it thickens to nap a spoon. Taste and adjust salt. Fish out and discard the large whole spices (bay leaves, cinnamon, the largest cardamom pods) before serving, or warn your guests. The finished curry should have a bright red-orange oil glistening at the surface — this is the maα (ghee separating back out), a sign of a properly cooked South Asian curry. Serve with steamed rice (Kashmiri basmati) or warm naan.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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