

the ultimate easy-but-fancy spring menu

BY CAROLINE CHAMBERS / What to Cook When You Don't Feel Like Cooking

THE SHOPPING LIST

Meat + Seafood

- ☐ 4-5 pound boneless leg of lamb

Produce

- ☐ 5-ounce container pre-washed mixed greens or arugula
- ☐ 1 pound asparagus, medium sized (about the size of a pencil)
- ☐ 2 pounds of Yukon gold potatoes
- ☐ 3 shallots
- ☐ 1 medium red onion
- ☐ 4 large lemons
- ☐ fresh garlic, a whole bulb (or a bag of peeled garlic)
- ☐ fresh mint (a lot of it! like 2.5 cups worth)
- ☐ 1 fresh rosemary sprig (or dried works)

Dairy + Eggs

- ☐ 1 stick unsalted butter
- ☐ 3 ounces gruyère cheese
- ☐ 2 ounces parmesan cheese
- ☐ 1 pint heavy cream
- ☐ 1 cup greek yogurt
- ☐ ¼ cup mayo or sour cream (optional, can also just use more greek yogurt)

Oils, Vinegars, Sauces

- ☐ extra-virgin olive oil
- ☐ neutral cooking oil
- ☐ hot honey
- ☐ honey

- ☐ champagne vinegar (you need a lot! buy a new bottle of it if you're running low)
- ☐ balsamic vinegar
- ☐ dijon mustard

Shelf

- ☐ 4 cups pecan halves
- ☐ ¼ cup chopped roasted salted almonds (or any nuts works)
- ☐ 2 cups of self-rising flour
- ☐ low-sodium chicken broth
- ☐ brown sugar
- ☐ white sugar

Spices

- ☐ kosher salt
- ☐ flaky sea salt
- ☐ fresh ground pepper
- ☐ greek seasoning (such as Cavender's)
- ☐ red pepper flakes

Drinks/Juices/Liquor

- ☐ grapefruit juice (can squeeze it fresh – buy 5 grapefruits) or buy storebought)
- ☐ Gin (or your choice of clear liquor)
- ☐ club soda

THE MENU

Drinks + Appetizers:

- **Salty Minty Dogs.** AKA a perfectly tangy grapefruit, mint, and gin (or vodka or tequila!) drink. So refreshing.
- **Rosemary Pecans.** These addicting pecans will serve double duty! Reserve 1/2 cup to add to the salad, then snack on the rest as an app.
- Am I allowed to tell you to make **cream cheese + pepper jelly** again... ? Cool. Take a brick of cream cheese, dump pepper jelly all over it, serve with crackers. Appetizer gold.

The Main Event:

- **Gruyère & Black Pepper Biscuits with Hot Honey Butter**
 - **Slow-Roasted Lamb with Minty Yogurt Sauce**
 - **Lemony Greek Potatoes**
 - **Springy Salad**
 - **Balsamic Butter Asparagus**
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THE PLAN OF ATTACK

Here's how to feel cool, calm, and collected while cooking this feast:

Ahead of time:

1. Pickle the **onions** up to 5 days in advance.
2. Make the **champagne vinaigrette** up to 5 days in advance.
3. Make the **rosemary pecans** up to 3 days in advance and store them in an airtight container at room temperature.
4. Make the **minty yogurt sauce** up to 2 days in advance and store it in an airtight container in the fridge.
5. Start marinating the **lamb** 24 hours before cooking, or at least the morning of.
6. Make the **salty minty dogs** the night before, but don't add the club soda until the last minute. Make the **lemony salt** and cover with plastic wrap in the fridge.
7. Prep the **springy salad** by adding the greens, Parm, and pickled red onions to a large serving bowl the night before. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until party time. Don't add the nuts or dressing until the last minute.
8. Set the table! I got all of these wonderful pink linens from [Heather Taylor Home](#).

Day of:

Three hours before guests arrive:

1. Get the **lamb and potatoes** into the oven. Better to eat room temperature lamb and potatoes than to have all of your guests sitting around waiting!
2. While they cook, make the **biscuits and honey butter**. Stick the butter in the waistband of your pants while you make the biscuits to bring it up to room temp for easy mixing with the honey! The honey butter can go straight onto the table and the prepped biscuits can sit at room temp until it's time to bake them if you don't have room in the fridge (but, ideally, you'll find room in the fridge because cold biscuit dough = flakier biscuits).

One hour before guests arrive:

1. When the lamb and potatoes finish cooking, bake the biscuits. Set a timer, don't you dare burn them!
2. Transfer the potatoes to a serving dish, cover with foil, and set them on the table.
3. Make the **asparagus**. It's delicious at room temp so don't worry about it cooling down! Set it on the table.

4. Finish up the lamb, slice it, arrange on a serving platter. Set it on the table.
5. Set up a little cocktail station with the pitcher of salty minty dogs, glasses, an ice bucket, and the lemony salt and a lemon wedge for people to rim their glasses.

Just before guests arrive:

1. Dress the salad (and add the nuts). Set it on the table.
2. Put your minty yogurt sauce in a serving bowl and add it to the table.
3. Add the club soda to the cocktail pitcher.
4. Garnish anything that's looking a tad too beige with freshly chopped soft herbs (mint, basil, or parsley will all be great with these flavors).
5. Pour yourself a drink! You did it!

THE RECIPES

Salty Minty Dogs

Makes 4 cocktails (AKA you should double this, if you'll need more than 4 drinks!)

Prep time: 10 minutes

Tools:

- [Microplane](#) or grater
- Serving pitcher
- Small plate

Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup sea salt
- 1 lemon, preferably organic, zested
- 2 cups grapefruit juice
- 1 cup gin
- 1/2 cup club soda
- 2 large mint sprigs, plus more for garnish

Pour **1/2 cup sea salt** onto a small plate and grate **the zest of 1 lemon** right on top. Use your fingers to pinch the zest into the salt.

Combine **2 cups grapefruit juice, 1 cup gin, and 1/2 cup club soda** in a pitcher. Slap **2 large mint sprigs** between your hands, then add them to the pitcher.

Cut the **lemon** in half and use it to wet the rims of your glasses. Dip the rim in the lemon salt. Fill the glasses with ice, then pour in the drink!

If you want to make these ahead of time, that's a great plan, **but don't add the club soda until the last minute.*

Rosemary Pecans

Serves 6

Cook time: 35 minutes

Tools:

- Large rimmed baking sheet
- Microwavable bowl to melt the butter

Ingredients:

- 4 cups pecan halves
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary sprigs, finely minced, or 1 teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed (crushed using a mortar and pestle, spice grinder, or clean coffee grinder)
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt

Preheat oven to 250°F.

Place **4 cups pecan halves** on a large rimmed baking sheet. Melt **4 tablespoons butter** and pour it over top along with **1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary, 2 tablespoons brown sugar, and 3/4 teaspoon salt**. Use your hands to toss everything around and get the nuts evenly coated.

Spread the nuts into an even layer, then bake for 20 to 30 minutes, until deeply toasted. Give them a stir every 10 minutes or so.

Allow to cool completely, then transfer to an airtight container.

Gruyere + Black Pepper Biscuits with Hot Honey Butter

Cook time: 45 minutes

Tools:

- [Large baking sheet](#)
- [Parchment paper](#)
- [Large bowl](#)
- [Chef's knife](#)
- [Basting brush](#), if you've got one
- Small bowl

Ingredients:

- 2 cups self-rising flour
- 3 ounces grated Gruyère cheese (a little less than 1 cup)
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper (ground on the largest setting — we want big flecks of pepper)
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream, plus more for brushing the biscuits
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 tablespoon hot honey (I love [Red Clay](#))

Preheat oven to 475°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Add **2 cups self-rising flour, 3 ounces grated gruyère, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper** to a large bowl and use a fork to stir to combine. Stir in **1 1/2 cups heavy cream** as much as possible with the fork, then use your hands to combine everything. You'll think that there's too much flour but there's not! Use your hands to work it into the dough.

Transfer the dough to the baking sheet and flatten it into about the size of a piece of computer paper, then fold it in half and repeat that process twice more (the process = flatten it out as much as possible, then fold it). It'll get harder to flatten it with each fold — that's normal! We're creating those flaky biscuit layers here!

Pat the thrice-folded dough into a 1 inch-thick rectangle, then cut it into 8 biscuits. *Or 16 biscuits, if you want to make little appetizer biscuits!*

Separate the biscuits and brush them with a bit of extra heavy cream. If you don't own a pastry brush, just use your finger to coat the tops and sides of the biscuits. This will help them brown nicely.

Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until golden brown and puffy and gorgeous!

While they're baking, add **4 tablespoons room-temperature unsalted butter, 1 tablespoon hot honey**, and **a pinch of kosher salt** to a small bowl and smash to combine. It takes a sec — just be patient (maybe give this job to a kid!) and keep smashing. After a couple minutes it'll come together.

Lamb + Potatoes

Serves 6

Cook time: 2 hours + 15 minutes rest time (*if possible, brine the lamb for up to 24 hours, or at least 4!*)

Tools:

- [Plastic cutting board](#)
- Another [cutting board](#)
- Kitchen twine
- Small roasting dish (or [Dutch oven](#) or [cast-iron skillet](#))
- [Chef's knife](#)
- Another roasting dish, one with high sides (I used a 9x13-inch cake pan)
- [Meat thermometer](#)
- 1 (4- to 5-pound) boneless leg of lamb
- 3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons Greek seasoning, divided
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 2 1/2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper, divided
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 pounds Yukon gold potatoes
- 3 shallots
- 2 large lemons
- 3/4 cup low-sodium chicken broth
- Fresh mint or parsley sprigs
- Flaky sea salt

Ingredients:

Place **1 boneless leg of lamb** on a plastic cutting board and if it came in netting, remove the netting. Open up the lamb, dry with a clean kitchen towel, then use a sharp knife to remove excess fat from the center (non-smooth side) of the leg. Flip it over and trim off all but a very thin layer of fat (we want to remove the hard, thick white fat, but a thin layer is a good thing).

Season it all over with **3 tablespoons Greek seasoning, 1 tablespoon kosher salt, and 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper**. Roll the lamb up as tightly as you can into a coil, then use kitchen twine to truss it, AKA cut 3 or 4 long pieces of twine and tie the leg together. Put the lamb in a small roasting dish (a Dutch oven or cast iron skillet works!) fat side UP and place in the refrigerator, uncovered, for at least 4, but ideally 24 hours.

When you're ready to cook, preheat your oven to 300°F and remove the lamb from the refrigerator. Pour **1/2 cup low-sodium chicken stock** around the lamb.

Cut **2 pounds Yukon gold potatoes** into 1-inch wedges, and halve and peel **3 shallots** and place them in a roasting dish with high sides (I used a 9x13" cake pan!). Drizzle with **1/4 cup oil, 2 teaspoons Greek seasoning, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt, 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, the juice of 2 large lemons, and 1/4 cup low-sodium chicken broth** and toss to coat.

Roast the lamb and potatoes for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, stirring the potatoes every 30 minutes, until an internal thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the lamb registers 130°F.

Remove the potatoes and lamb from the oven and crank the oven up to 500°F. Once it reaches 500°F, return the lamb to the oven for 7 to 10 minutes to crisp up the fatty top.

Transfer the lamb to a clean cutting board to rest for at least 15 minutes. Cut off the twine, then thinly slice and arrange with **lots of fresh herbs**. Transfer the potatoes to a serving dish (or serve them straight from the roasting pan). Sprinkle flaky sea salt over the potatoes and lamb before serving.

Springy Salad

Serves 6

Cook time: 10 minutes (plus 20 minutes or more to let the onions pickle)

Tools:

- [Chef's knife](#)
- [Cutting board](#)
- 2 jars or glass containers
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cup champagne vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons honey
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

Ingredients:

Salad:

Pickled Red Onions:

- 1 medium red onion, thinly sliced
- Champagne vinegar
- Hot water
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 5-ounce container of washed mixed greens or arugula
- 1/2 cup Rosemary Pecans (recipe above, or purchase store-bought candied pecans), finely chopped
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese (no need to actually measure this, just grab a wedge of Parm and use a vegetable peeler to peel as many pieces as you want onto your salad!)

Champagne Vinaigrette:

To make the pickled red onions, slice **1 red onion** as thinly as you can and stuff the slices into a jar or glass container. Fill the container **3/4 of the way up with champagne vinegar**, then fill it the rest of the way with **hot tap water**. Add **1 tablespoon sugar and 1/2 teaspoon salt** and shake to combine. Leave at room temperature for at least 30 minutes, or ideally refrigerate for at least 24 hours before using.

To make the champagne vinaigrette, add all the ingredients (**1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, 1/4 cup champagne vinegar, 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard, 2 teaspoons honey, and 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt**) to a jar and shake to combine. Taste and adjust to your liking (some like it sweeter, some like it tangier!).

Add **5 ounces mixed greens, a handful of pickled red onions** (you can also chop these up so that you get just a small bit of onion in each bite), **1/2 cup finely chopped Rosemary Pecans, and a bunch of shaved Parm** to a large salad bowl. Toss with your desired amount of champagne vinaigrette, season with **kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**, and serve immediately.

Balsamic Butter Asparagus

Serves 6

Cook time: 15 minutes

Tools:

- [Chef's knife](#)
- [Cutting board](#)
- Large [skillet](#) with a lid (or you can use a baking sheet as a lid)
- Serving platter

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 pound asparagus (ideally medium sized, about the width of a pencil), woody stems removed (AKA, trim about 2 inches off the bottom and discard them because they are tough and fibrous!)
- Big pinch of kosher salt
- 6 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- Big pinch of red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup chopped roasted salted almonds (or any nut works)

Warm **1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil** in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add **1 pound trimmed asparagus and a big pinch of salt** and get the asparagus into as even a layer as possible so that they're touching the skillet as much as possible. Cover (use a baking sheet if you don't have a lid that fits) and let them sit for 3 minutes.

Meanwhile, smash **6 garlic cloves** as flat as possible using the side of a chef's knife. Place the flat edge of the knife on top of a garlic clove on a cutting board, then use your fist to bang down on the blade as hard as you can to smash the garlic!

Uncover the skillet, add the smashed garlic, shake the skillet to move the asparagus around, then cover for another 2 minutes.

Meanwhile, chop **1/4 cup roasted salted almonds** and set aside.

Stir **a big pinch of red pepper flakes, 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar, and 1 tablespoon unsalted butter** into the asparagus and toss to coat.

Transfer asparagus to a serving platter and scatter the chopped almonds and **a pinch of flaky salt** over top. I grated a bit of lemon zest on top too!

Minty Yogurt Sauce

Serves 6

Tools:

- [Food processor](#) or [blender](#)
- Serving bowl

Ingredients:

- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- 1/4 cup mayo or sour cream
- 1 1/2 packed cups mint leaves
- 1 garlic clove, peeled
- 1 large lemon, ideally organic because we're zesting it
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Add **1 cup Greek yogurt, 1/4 cup mayo, 1 1/2 packed cups mint leaves, 1 peeled garlic clove, the zest and juice of 1 lemon, and 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt** to a food processor or blender and blend until smooth. Transfer to a serving bowl.