

# URBAN GRILLER

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## Greek Souvlaki

When I was a young adult growing up in Perth, more often than not at 2 or 3 a.m. on a Saturday morning I could be found in the Plaka souvlaki bar in Northbridge. This place was an institution and made the best souvlaki in the galaxy. I was addicted to the lamb souvlaki with garlic yoghurt sauce, feta cheese and fried egg and the freshly cooked chips covered in garlic yoghurt sauce the accompaniment of choice. Unfortunately while the Plaka still exists, my favourite souvlaki is no longer on the menu and I've never been a fan of Doner.

Nowadays, I have learnt to duplicate this lamb souvlaki miracle on the barbecue and I no longer make the Saturday morning pilgrimage.

150 to 200 grams of lamb chunks per souvlaki

Chopped tomato

Chopped salad onion

Shredded lettuce

Crushed garlic

Greek yoghurt

Pita bread

Greaseproof paper, cut into squares 30 centimetres by 30 centimetres roughly.

The process for making souvlaki is extremely simple but there is a trick, you will need to know how to roll the souvlaki successfully (it's worth doing a little practice first). This is a great thing to do with your guests at a barbecue, you can show them how to roll their own and let them do it themselves, it's a lot of fun but keep an eye on them because it's not the easiest thing to do if you've never done it before.

I always liked to brine my lamb the day before I intend to use it. To do this mix one tablespoon of salt in one litre of water and some crushed garlic and a couple of twigs of Rosemary if you have them, and put the mix in the refrigerator overnight. Be sure to take the mixture out of the refrigerator, drain and allow the lamb chunks to dry before barbecuing them.

Make up the garlic sauce by crushing some garlic and stirring it into the yoghurt.

Make sure all the other ingredients are chopped and ready.

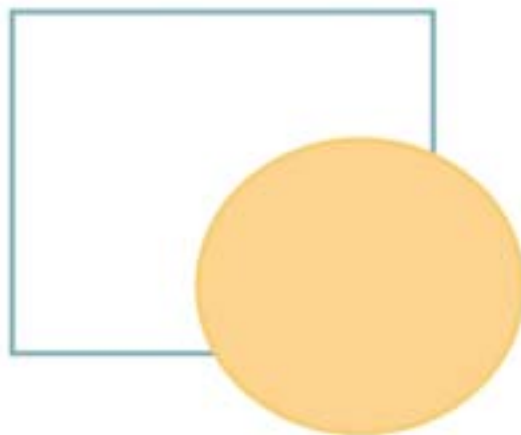


Cook the lamb on the barbecue, no surprises here, just be careful not to overcook it you want it to remain juicy and tender.



Brush a piece of Pita bread on both sides with a little oil and heat it both sides on the grill until just starting to toast. Be careful with this part of the process because if you eat it too much the Pita bread will become crisp and you will not be able to roll it.

Now, here is the first secret to learn. You need to place your Pita bread on the greaseproof paper in the bottom right-hand corner (if you are left-handed you will probably want to use the bottom left-hand corner) so that the paper travels through the one and the eight if the Pita bread was a clock face. This is extremely important, if it is not done like this you will end up rolling the paper inside the souvlaki making it difficult to eat.



The next part of the secret is in the order in which you assemble the souvlaki, it's quite simple, put the hot things down first, i.e. the cooked lamb then the wet stuff (garlic sauce) then the rest of the ingredients finishing with the shredded lettuce. The reason behind this is when you roll the souvlaki up your going to need to push together with your fingers and it's better to push on the shredded lettuce than the hot meat and garlic sauce.



When everything is assembled carefully roll the souvlaki away from yourself remembering to pick up the greaseproof paper on the way.



Once it is successfully rolled twist the loose end and fold it back against the souvlaki this will prevent the garlic sauce and all the other bits, particularly the sauce from falling out the bottom when you stand it on its end to eat.



Of course you could use chicken, fish, shellfish or cooked vegetables instead of lamb and you could use hummus or garlic sauce or even (shudder) tomato sauce, but for my money, the good old traditional Greek lamb souvlaki is difficult to beat.



If you have vegetarians coming to your barbecue, respect their needs and make them a vegetarian version, remember not to use any marinade which is being used to cook meat!

Rule Number 43 of great BBQ - Always "rubbish" vegetarian food as "not real BBQ" but cook it better than the veggie at your BBQ can!

OK - so vegetarian I'm not!

This is a dish that caters for vegetarians and vegans without relegating them to the salad bar. This dish is high in protein, looks and grills like a pork or lamb steak, tastes great, has a wonderful "chewy" texture and if made up as kebabs, looks indistinguishable from meat!

Anyone who has been to a serious vegetarian restaurant, particularly anyone who is also a serious carnivore will be familiar with a thing called "mock pork" or "mock chicken". From my conversations with vegetarians within my social reach, it would seem that the process of manufacture of this delicacy is a closely guarded secret; unfortunate, as it is also an excellent source of protein, not to mention texture in a diet where such things are largely scarce.

In fact we are talking about an ancient food called Saitan (say-tan); made from wheat flour (unfortunate for those vegetarians who also have coeliac disease; and before you serve it, make sure you know if your guests are allergic to wheat products).

Traditionally Saitan is produced by kneading dough almost forever under water (yes - under water!) or under running water until a thick rubbery substance remains; yawn! Luckily modern science provides a simple answer. Not only that; but if you get used to this recipe you can make vegetarian steaks, kebabs, nuggets, etc. With a bit of practice and some culinary experimentation, you can make any flavour you like - satay, chilli, onion, garlic are easy, but with imagination you can master curry, pesto, herb and much more.

Here it is.

With a fork, mix together two cups of stock or seriously flavoured water with two cups of gluten flour until a firm, elastic dough forms. Form this into a compressed ball (this bit needs practice, but if you just want lumps for kebabs or sweet and sour - don't worry). Chill the ball for an hour in a sealed container in the fridge.

Make a flavoured stock, slice the Saitan ball into thick 'steaks' or kebab chunks and simmer in the stock for 45 minutes. Remove the 'steaks' from the stock and allow everything to cool. Use the steaks in the usual manner or return to the stock (and fridge) for up to 4 days. Make sure the 'steaks' are dry before cooking. Brush with a little oil and cook just like steak or meat kebabs. 10 minutes is fine, it develops grill marks nicely and looks (almost) like the real thing. If you want to crumb them, make a batter by thinning tahini with water (vegans don't eat eggs), flour the steaks, dip into tahini batter then bread crumbs.

Experiment with this recipe - you can seriously get any flavour you like and the flavour is what it's all about. If in doubt, use a tablespoon of good curry paste and 4 cloves of garlic in the Saitan and the simmering stock or ginger, garlic and peanut butter for a Thai kind of thing; go nuts! (actually nuts would be good to add when making the Saitan).

TIP: Save the simmering stock to use in making the next batch of Saitan dough if you are making another within a week!