

Master Butchers share their tips to help you prepare perfect festive meal meats

The holiday season calls for festive feasts, and what better way to celebrate than with a delicious Christmas Day or New Year's lunch using the finest cuts of meat?

To help you prepare, we turned to five of Shoprite and Checkers' team of more than 120 Master Butchers for expert advice on the best meats to select and tips for perfect preparation.

Master Butchers are highly skilled professionals who specialise in every aspect of meat processing, from farm to fork. Achieving this status takes multiple years of intensive training as part of the Shoprite and Checkers' internationally recognised Master Meat Artisan Programme that is underwritten by the [UK's Institute of Meat](#).

The retailer is the only company on the continent to present this elite and highly specialised butchery learning programme that upskills its employees in butchery expertise, business acumen, and food hygiene and safety, amongst other topics.

Here are top recommendations from these masters of meat to impress your guests this Christmas:

Leg of lamb

Priscilla Chetty (Checkers Virginia Circle, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal)

The leg of lamb is a timeless choice for Christmas lunch. I suggest marinating it with fresh rosemary and garlic cloves for an aromatic touch. Pierce the meat all over with a knife and insert the garlic cloves into the holes.

Drizzle olive oil over the lamb and season, wrap it in foil to seal in the moisture, and roast in a large pan. Uncover 30 minutes before the end and return to the oven to brown. This method ensures a succulent, juicy lamb that will delight your guests.

Lamb with a twist

Letitia Loxton (Checkers Metlife Plaza, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape)

A specialist cut that I like on my festive table is a crown of lamb; there is something so impressive about presenting it to friends and family. It can be a tricky piece of meat to prepare as you can't sear the outside before roasting as you'd typically do with other meats.

A tip I learnt is to pop scrunched up foil in the centre of the crown; the heat that the foil reflects helps to cook the lamb. You also need to wrap each exposed bone with a small piece of foil to prevent them from burning during roasting.

Season the lamb with your favourite spices to allow the meat to absorb the flavours and slip a few sprigs of rosemary into the twin for added flavour and aroma. Once seasoned, roast for approximately 40 minutes until it reaches a medium-rare finish. This results in tender and aromatic lamb that's perfect for the holiday table.

Gammon

Mthetheleli Booi (Shoprite Ziyabuya, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape)

Gammon makes for an excellent festive centerpiece. Although it can be an intimidating piece of meat for some people, it is actually quite simple to prepare.

It is important to consider the size of the pot the gammon will be simmering in when making your selection in store. Start by placing the gammon in a pot filled halfway with water. Leave its netting on to maintain the shape while cooking. Add carrots and onions, cover and cook for about 2 hours, checking the water level regularly.

Once the gammon is cooked, remove the netting and let it cool before glazing it. An important step that most people forget is peeling off the top layer of skin or rind before glazing to expose the fat. To create the classic gammon look, score diamonds with a sharp knife into the fat; being careful not to go too deep.

My preferred glaze is a mixture of five tablespoons of honey and two tablespoons of mustard. Pour it over the gammon and bake at 210°C for 30 minutes, continuously basting, until the outside is golden and crispy.

Beef rib eye

Lumka Msithwa (Checkers Mount Richmore, Salt Rock, Eastern Cape)

If you're after a hearty, rich cut of meat, the beef rib eye roast is a perfect choice. I recommend generously seasoning the beef with salt and pepper.

Then, roast it in the oven for about 2 hours depending on its size. My preferred way of preparing it is to slowly cook the meat at a low temperature until it is almost at my desired doneness and then searing it on high heat to create a crust.

This simple yet effective method brings out the natural flavour of the meat, making it an excellent addition to your Christmas spread.

Pork roast

Aubrey Williams (Shoprite King Williams Town, Eastern Cape)

For the perfect pork roast, I like to dry the meat with a paper towel first. If the rind hasn't been scored, I use a small sharp knife, deeply scoring the rind without cutting into the meat.

I suggest putting the scored roast in the fridge uncovered for one hour or overnight as this helps to dry out the rind and improve the crackling. Season your roast with oil, salt, pepper and spices of choice and make sure the oil and seasoning is worked into the scores on the rind. Place the roast on a wire rack inside a baking tray and cook at 240°C until the rind crackles, then lower to 180°C and cook until your preferred doneness.

Whether you're roasting beef, lamb, or gammon, these Master Butcher-approved tips will ensure your holiday meal is a truly special one that you can enjoy with great food and loved ones.

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