

Lamb Shanks With Olives

(Serves 4)

Time: 2 hours or more, largely unattended. This can be made several days ahead.

Ingredients:

1	tablespoon	Olive oil
4	1-lb	Lamb shanks
		Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
2	cups	Onions, sliced
1	tablespoon	Garlic, minced
½	teaspoon	Thyme leaves, fresh or a couple sprigs fresh thyme, or ½ teaspoon of dried thyme
½	cup	Lamb, beef, chicken, or vegetable stock or white or red wine or water or combination
1	cup	Tomatoes, cored, skinned and chopped (canned are fine, drain them first)
1 ½	cups	Olives, assorted, pitted (see Cook's Tip below)
		Basil or parsley leaves, fresh, minced for garnish

Instructions:

1. Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a large, deep skillet or casserole that can later be covered. Add the shanks and brown on all sides, seasoning with salt and pepper as they cook. (You can also do the initial browning in the oven: Preheat to 500 F and roast the lamb shanks [you may omit the oil], turning once or twice, until brown all over; this will take a little longer but will be somewhat easier and much neater.)
2. Remove the lamb and remove and discard all but 2 tablespoons of fat. Cook the onions over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until they soften and turn golden, about 10 minutes.
3. Add the garlic and thyme and cook another minute, then add the liquid(s), some salt and pepper and the tomatoes; stir to blend. Return the lamb shanks to the pan, turn then once or twice, cover and turn the heat to low. (If your pan is oven-proof you can also put this in the oven on 200 F at this point.)
4. Cook for 30 minutes, turn the shanks, and add the olives. Continue to cook for at least another hour, turning occasionally, until the shanks are very tender (a toothpick inserted into them will meet little resistance) and the meat is nearly falling from the bone. (The recipe can be prepared a day or two in advance up to this point; cool, place in a covered container and refrigerate.) Garnish and serve.

Cook's Tips: Use a mix of the best olives you can afford to make this dish especially tasty. I like the large green Cerrignola olives from Southern Italy. They have a nutty, buttery taste that works well in long cooking. The black Calamatas are another favourite. Taste them first before buying, some batches can be bitter.

To pit whole olives, place an olive on a cutting board and “bang” with the back of a knife or heavy pot. Remove the pit. Careful, they're slippery!