

TECHNIQUE OF THE QUARTER: BARBECUE

WHAT IS A BARBECUE?

You need only mention the word barbecue or search for specific information on the Internet to discover that there are intense debates about what barbecue truly is. And while there may be very little about barbecue that is commonly agreed upon by all its many practitioners and fans, there are some basic facts that most would agree to:

- Barbecue is not the same as grilling, even if you grill foods with a barbecue sauce.
- Barbecuing requires smoke to properly flavor and color the food.
- Barbecued foods are cooked at low temperatures for long periods in order to develop the best flavor and an extremely tender texture, often referred to as slow-and-low cooking.

Beyond that, controversy reigns. Some believe that pork is the only real barbecue, but beef, mutton, and even goat (kid) are traditional choices for others. Some argue in favor of a thick, tomato-based sauce, others for a thin, vinegar-based sauce with no tomatoes at all. Some prefer hickory for fuel, while others tend toward pecan, maple, or oak.

In addition to being a style of cooking, barbecue is also widely understood to be a social gathering, especially in the open air at which barbecued foods are eaten. Throughout the country, barbecues are the foundation of church suppers, political fund-raisers, and community of neighborhood gatherings. These gatherings have given rise to the repertoire of side dishes served along with the meat, including such classics as cole slaw, corn bread, boiled potatoes, and beans.

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF BARBECUE

Meat, Fish, Poultry, or Vegetables

The tradition and history of barbecue show that this technique evolved as a way to make tough, well-exercised meats very tender. But the exact type of meat that is associated with an area has a great deal to do with local availability. Seafood and fish do not need long, slow cooking to become tender, but in areas where seafood is widely available, it becomes “meat” for the barbecue as well. Throughout the South, with the exception of Texas, you are more likely to find pork than beef. In some areas, mutton is barbecued.

Wood or Charcoal for Smoke

Hardwoods, including oak, hickory, pecan, maple, beech, butternut, and ash are among the common choices for barbecue. Other options include mesquite, grapevine, citrus wood, and apple or pear. Each wood has a specific flavor. Some barbecue cooks blend the woods, especially when they use very strongly flavored woods and vines such as mesquite. Softwoods (pine, spruce, and other evergreens) should never be used; they produce a resinous and bitter flavor.

The presence of a smoke ring is a sign that foods have been smoked, rather than merely grilled or roasted and brushed with a sauce. The smoke ring is reddish in color and may be about ¼ to ½ inch (8 to 12 millimeters) deep, extending from the exterior toward the center.

Wood or Charcoal for Smoke

Barbecues are sometimes referred to as “pits,” a reminder of an earlier time when a pit dug in the ground was common. A barbecue, regardless of its size, has a place to hold hot coals, racks to hold meats, and a tight cover to capture the smoke. Some barbecues have a separate chamber for building and maintaining the fire.

Barbecuing temperatures are intentionally kept low in order to give the meat plenty of time to cook, become tender, and develop a rich color and aroma. There are two common ways to apply the heat and smoke:

- Indirect heat (where the fire is maintained in a separate chamber and the heat and smoke are vented into a closed portion of the barbecue). The fire is maintained between 225° and 250° (107° to 121°C), a temperature that is hot enough to generate smoke and that cooks meat slowly.
- Direct heat (the food cooks directly over the coals in a closed barbecue). This style of barbecue cooks meat at 300° to 350°F (149° to 176°C), and is often used for smaller and more tender cuts that cook more quickly (seafood or poultry, for instance).

In addition to a barbecue (not, of course, to be confused with a regular grill), barbecuing requires additional tools including:

- Containers to hold meats as they brine or marinate
- Brushes or mops to apply basting and finishing sauces
- Cutting boards
- Pots to keep basting and barbecue sauces at a simmer
- Knives to slice or chop meats (or gloved hands to pull meats apart into strips)

Seasonings

The way barbecue can be seasoned varies from region to region as well as from chef to chef. Each of the following techniques can be used, either singly or in combination. The exact ingredients in a specific rub, mop, or sauce are highly individualized mixtures kept as closely guarded secrets.

Rubs are a mixture of spices, salt, and sugar. Dry rubs contain no moisture and are applied in a layer and left on the meat for several hours (or even days) before the meat is cooked. Wet rubs contain enough moisture to hold the ingredients together as a paste; jerk seasoning is an example of a wet rub.

Marinades and brines are liquid mixtures used to season meats before they are cooked. Marinades typically contain an oil, an acid (such as vinegar), and various spices and seasonings. A brine, at its simplest, is a mixture of salt and water, though it may also contain acids and spices. Brines may be used to submerge foods, or they may be injected directly into the meat. The primary purpose of both marinades and brines is to add flavor to the meat. Contrary to what some have claimed, they do not actually add moisture to the meat.

Basting sauces (also known as mops or sops) are applied to barbecued foods as they cook. The basting sauce may be the same marinade or brine used to season the meat, or a separate preparation. These sauces do not contain sugar, since the sugar tends to brown and burn too soon.

Barbecue sauces are used in some regions as a finishing sauce or glaze. Some barbecue styles call for the sauce to be served as a condiment, if it is served at all. The ingredients in a barbecue sauce range from the vinegar and seasoning mixtures favored in the Carolinas to the tomato-based sauces of Kansas and Texas. Mustard-based sauces and mayonnaise-based sauces (known as white barbecue sauce) are also found.

Barbecue Styles

The United States, while not the only part of the world to “barbecue” foods has four distinct styles of barbecue, augmented by several specialty or regionally popular types of barbecue. The following descriptions of barbecue styles in the United States are generally accepted, but, as with any traditional food, there are plenty of variations. Even in areas where a particular type of meat predominates, there are always numerous options, including variety meats, sausages, and game or poultry.

Carolina style

Pork is the typical meat in a Carolina-style barbecue, including the whole hog and pork shoulder. The meat is often cooked until tender enough to shred, and then chopped or sliced and served as a sandwich. The sauce varies depending upon the part of the Carolinas:

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Memphis style

Pork is also popular in Memphis-style barbecue. Pulled pork is a common presentation. Ribs, however, remain the most well-known meat in Memphis barbecue.

Sauces are typically tomato-based and sweet, often from the addition of molasses. They may also include mustard, making this barbecue sauce a mixture of all the major components of barbecue sauce.

Texas style

Beef is featured in Texas-style barbecue. Beef brisket is considered the most traditional. It is often served as chopped beef sandwiches. Ribs, sausage, and, especially in South Texas, cabrito (barbecued kid) are also popular. Long, slow cooking gives the meat a smoke ring, a naturally occurring band of color in the meat (as previously discussed).

Sauces in Texas are generally not as sweet as Kansas City-style barbecue sauces. Some sauces are thin and made primarily from vinegar and spices, especially chiles and pepper, while others are somewhat thicker (though also not as thick as Kansas City-style sauces). Barbecue sauce may be optional; some consider it appropriate to serve the sauce as a condiment, rather than brushing it on the meat as it cooks.

Kansas City style

Although pork is commonly associated with Kansas City-style barbecue, there is also a strong tradition of barbecuing other meats, including beef; no doubt the result of Kansas City's important role as a meat-packing center. The thick, tomatoey style of Kansas City barbecue sauce has become the prototype for commercial sauces sold nationwide.

Other Barbecue Traditions

As you might suspect, because barbecuing is such a good way to handle tougher cuts of meat, it has been practiced under different names throughout the world, as well as in parts of the country outside of Texas, the Carolinas, Memphis, and Kansas City.

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BAKED BEANS

2 cups dried navy or Great Northern beans soaked overnight

8 slices bacon, dried

1 onion, diced

½ cup brown sugar

¼ cup molasses

1 tsp dry mustard

to taste salt

to taste black pepper, freshly ground

Yield: 12 Portions

1.

BRAISED GREENS

10 oz bacon, dice

8 oz onions, dice

4 lb greens, mustard, beet, collard, turnip, or chard, chopped

16 oz chicken or vegetable stock

2 tsp salt

½ tsp ground black pepper

Yield: 12 Portions

COLESLAW

6 oz sour cream
2 oz mayonnaise
2 oz cider vinegar
1 tbsp dry mustard
1 ½ oz sugar
2 tsp celery seed
as req salt
as req pepper
1 ½ lb green cabbage, shredded
6 oz carrots, shredded

Yield: 10 Portions

1. Mix the sour cream, mayonnaise, vinegar, mustard, sugar, and celery seed together in a large bowl until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
2. Add the cabbage and carrots and toss until evenly coated.
3. Serve immediately or refrigerate for later service.

CORN BREAD

1 ¼ lb sugar
¾ oz salt
1 ½ lb flour, all-purpose
10oz yellow cornmeal
1 oz baking powder
9oz eggs, lightly beaten
20oz milk
12oz corn oil
2 tbsp orange juice concentrate, at room temperature

Yield: 1 half sheet pan or 3 dozen muffins

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and heat a half sheet pan in the oven.
2. Combine the sugar, salt, flour, cornmeal, and baking powder in the bowl of an electric mixer and stir to blend.
3. In a separate bowl, thoroughly combine the remaining ingredients.

GARLIC CHEESE GRITS CASSEROLE

1 cup grits, long cooking, stone ground preferred

1 tsp salt

2 ea eggs, lightly beaten

1 ea garlic clove, minced

¾ cup milk

to taste tabasco or similar hot pepper sauce

½ tsp worcestershire sauce

to taste cayenne pepper

2 cups cheddar cheese, sharp, grated

to taste salt

to taste black pepper, freshly ground

Yield: 8 portions

1. Bring 4 cups of water to a boil in a large pot. Preheat the oven to 350° F.
2. Butter a shallow baking dish.
3. Stir grits and 1 teaspoon salt into the boiling water. Reduce the heat and simmer, stirring constantly, about 30 minutes or until thick. Remove from the heat.
4. Mix together the eggs, garlic, milk, Tabasco, Worcestershire, and cayenne. Add mixture and 1 ½ cups of the cheese to the grits. Add salt and pepper to taste.
5. Pour mixture into the buttered dish.
6. Bake in the preheated oven until firm, about 20 minutes. Top with the remaining grated cheese and bake an additional 10 minutes.

MACARONI AND CHEESE

2 ¼ lb macarrón, uncooked

½ tsp salt

1qt cheddar cheese sauce

6oz bread crumbs, fresh (optional)

Yield: 10 portions

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil on the stove. Add the macaroni and return to a boil. Cook the pasta al dente, 7 to 9 minutes. Do not overcook.
2. Drain the pasta and shock. Mix the pasta with the sauce.
- 3.

MACARONI SALAD

2 lb elbow macaroni, cooked, cooled

5 oz celery, ne-dice

4 oz onion, ne-dice

4 oz green pepper, ne-dice

2 oz red pepper, ne-dice

1 tsp garlic, minced

12 oz mayonnaise or mustard-herb vinaigrette

as req Salt

as req Pepper

Yield: 10 portions

1. Combine the macaroni, celery, onions, green pepper, red pepper, and garlic. Add just enough mayonnaise to coat. Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.
2. Serve immediately or refrigerate for later service.

POTATO SALAD

2 ¼ lb red bliss potatoes
4 each egg, hard-cooked, chopped
5 oz onions, diced
5 oz celery, diced
1 oz mustard, dijon
1 pt mayonnaise
½ tsp worcestershire sauce
½ tsp salt
¼ tsp pepper

Yield: 10 portions

1. Place the potatoes in a pot. Cover with cold salted water and bring to a simmer. Cook until the potatoes can be easily pierced. Drain and dry. When they are cool enough to handle, slice or dice (peel if desired.)
2. Combine eggs and vegetables in a bowl. Mix the mustard, mayonnaise, Worcestershire sauce, salt and pepper.
3. Gently toss with potatoes. Adjust seasoning and chill.

APRICOT-ANCHO BARBECUE SAUCE

6 oz bacon, small dice
6 oz onion, small dice
1 tsp garlic, minced
5 oz apricots, dried
7 ¼ oz ketchup
2 oz malt vinegar
6 oz orange juice
6 oz dark brown sugar
2 each ancho chiles, diced
1 tsp paprika
1 tsp dry mustard
1 tsp tabasco sauce
1 tsp cayenne pepper
2 tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper, ground

Yield: 1 quart

1. Sauté the bacon until almost crisp, about 4 minutes. Add the onions and sauté until browned, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté another minute.
2. Add remaining ingredients. Simmer until the apricots are very soft. Purée in a blender; reheat and season as needed with salt and pepper.
3. Serve immediately or store under refrigeration.

BARBECUE MARINADE

10 oz vegetable oil
5 oz cider vinegar
1 oz worcestershire sauce
1 tbsp brown sugar
2 tsp dry mustard
1 tsp tabasco sauce
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp onion powder
¼ oz garlic, minced

Yield: 1 pint

1. Combine all the ingredients.
2. Add the food to be marinated or pour the marinade over it. Let marinate, under refrigeration, as required.

BARBECUE SAUCE

BARBECUE SPICE MIX

- ½ oz paprika
- ½ oz chili powder
- ½ oz salt
- 2 tsp cumin, ground
- 2 tsp Sugar
- 1 tsp dry mustard
- 1 tsp ground pepper
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp dried oregano

BARBECUED BEEF WITH ORANGE-CUMIN BARBECUE SAUCE

10 lb beef brisket

1/3 cup prepared mustard

½ cup barbecue Spice Rub

¼ cup kosher salt

Orange-Cumin Barbecue Sauce

1. Trim the meat of any excess fat and tissue, but leave a layer of fat to protect the meat as it cooks. Rub the meat with mustard and then season with the spice rub and salt. Refrigerate overnight.
2. The following day, preheat a grill to 225°F or prepare a slow charcoal re. Put the meat on the grill, fat side up and away from direct heat, and cover but leave vents open. Cook slowl until the meat is tender, 8 to 12 hours.
3. Check periodically to be sure that the grill temperature remains at about 225°F. Stoke the re with coals if necessary. (Do not add raw wood to the re or your meat may get too smoky.)
4. When the meat is done, it will have a dark, burnished exterior and it will be fork tender. If desired, baste the meat with Orange-Cumin Barbecue Sauce during the last half hour to give the brisket a nice gloss and tangy avor.
5. Transfer the meat to a cutting board to rest. Slice the meat across the grain and serve with Orange-Cumin Barbecue Sauce on the side.

BARBECUE SPICE RUB

¼ cup cumin seeds
2 tbsp black peppercorns
½ tsp whole cloves
½ cup paprika
¼ cup ancho chili powder
2 tbsp brown sugar
1 tbsp cayenne pepper

Yield: 1 ½ cups

1. Toast the cumin seeds, peppercorns and cloves in a hot, dry fry pan until they are aromatic and slightly darkened. Cool.
2. Grind the toasted spices to a powder, then mix with the paprika, chili powder, brown sugar and cayenne.
3. Store in an airtight container until needed.

ORANGE-CUMIN BARBECUE SAUCE

1 qt prepared barbecue sauce
1½ cup orange juice
1 cup orange marmalade
1/3 cup cider vinegar
2 tbsp barbecue Spice Rub
1 tbsp orange zest, grated
2 each chipotle chilies, canned with adobo, chopped

Yield: 1 ½ quarts

1. Combine all the ingredients in a 3-quart saucepan. Bring to a simmer, then simmer gently for 10 minutes to allow the flavors to develop.

BARBECUED CHICKEN BREAST

1 pt Apple cider
4 oz Cider vinegar
2 oz Shallots, minced
2 oz Garlic, minced
1 tsp Black pepper, ground
3 ½ lb Chicken breasts, skin on, bone-in
Barbecue sauce

Yield: 10 portions

1. Combine the apple cider, cider vinegar, shallots, garlic, and pepper to make a marinade.
2. Add the chicken to the marinade and turn to coat evenly. Marinate the chicken under refrigeration for at least 1 hour.
3. Barbecue the chicken breasts at 325°F until they are about halfway done, approximately 45 minutes. Turn the chicken periodically as it barbecues to cook it evenly. (Note: to barbecue in an oven, heat several charcoal briquets until glowing red. Add to a small hotel pan with a handful of soaked hardwood chips. Place in the oven below the chicken as it cooks.)
4. Apply thin layers of the barbecue sauce to the chicken and continue to barbecue, turning periodically, until the chicken is fully cooked and has an internal temperature of 170°F, another 30-45 minutes. (This may be done on a grill if desired.) Serve.

BARBECUED PORK RIBS

1 oz Paprika
½ tsp Cayenne
1 ¼ oz Brown sugar
1 tbsp Black pepper, ground
1 tsp Thyme, dried
5 each Garlic cloves, minced
1 tbsp Salt
10 lb Pork ribs, cleaned
Apricot-Ancho Barbecue Sauce

Yield: 10 portions

1. Create a rub by combining the paprika, cayenne, sugar, pepper, thyme, garlic, and salt.
2. Clean the ribs and remove the membrane.
3. Coat the ribs with the spice rub, shingle on sheet pans, and marinate at least 4 and up to 24 hours. Heat a barbecue or smoker to 300°F. Transfer the ribs to the barbecue and cook for about 4 hours, turning periodically. (Note: To barbecue in the oven, heat several charcoal briquets until glowing red. Add to a small hotel pan with a handful of soaked hardwood chips. Place in oven below ribs.)
4. Brush the ribs with a thin layer of the sauce and continue to barbecue, adding more thin layers of sauce, until the meat is very tender and the exterior has a deep brown color, another 1 to 1 ½ hours. Serve very hot.

GUAVA BARBECUE SAUCE

12 oz Guava marmalade
2 oz Tomato paste
1 tsp Molasses
1 oz Dry mustard
1 tbsp Cumin, ground
¾ oz Garlic, minced
4 oz Dry sherry
1 each Scotch bonnet chile, minced
8 oz Water
2 tsp Salt
1 tsp Black pepper, ground
4 oz Lime juice

Yield: 1 quart

1. In a medium saucepan, combine the marmalade, tomato paste, mustard, cumin, garlic, sherry, chile, water, salt, and pepper. Simmer the sauce for 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool.
2. Add the lime juice when the sauce has cooled. Serve immediately or store under refrigeration.

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PEANUT BARBECUE SAUCE

1 cup Ketchup

VINEGAR BARBECUE SAUCE

10 oz Vinegar, white

3 ½ tsp Red pepper flakes

1 pt Cider vinegar

1 ½ oz Tabasco sauce

1 ¾ oz Sugar

4 tsp Black peppercorns, cracked

Yield: 1 quart

1. Mix all the ingredients and allow the flavors to blend.
2. Serve immediately or store under refrigeration.

TEST YOUR BARBECUE KNOWLEDGE

1. Grilling and barbecuing are the same basic technique. *True or False*
2. Texas barbecue often features beef brisket. *True or False*
3. Softwoods, such as pine or hemlock, give barbecued meats the best flavor. *True or False*
4. Using indirect heat means that meats are cooked at around 200° to 300°. *True or False*
5. The term barbecue refers to a cooking method as well as a social gathering. *True or False*
6. A rub contains
 - a. honey
 - b. oil
 - c. mixture of seasonings, often including salt, sugar, and crushed or ground spices
 - d. an acid
7. A basting sauce never contains
 - a. oil
 - b. vinegar
 - c. spices
 - d. sugar
8. Jerk gets its seasoning from a
 - a. brine
 - b. marinade
 - c. rub, which may be either wet or dry
 - d. sauce
9. In Texas, barbecue sauce is
 - a. considered mandatory
 - b. extremely thick and sweet
 - c. always made with a tomato base
 - d. occasionally served as a condiment on the side
10. Carolina barbecue sauce is often
 - a. made with a vinegar base
 - b. thinner than sauces favored in Memphis or Kansas City
 - c. flavored with pepper
 - d. all the above

TEST YOUR BARBECUE KNOWLEDGE (ANSWER KEY)

1. Grilling and barbecuing are the same basic technique. *False*
2. Texas barbecue often features beef brisket. *True*
3. Softwoods, such as pine or hemlock, give barbecued meats the best flavor. *False*
4. Using indirect heat means that meats are cooked at around 200° to 300°. *False*
5. The term barbecue refers to a cooking method as well as a social gathering. *True*
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