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WILLIAMS-SONOMA

Technique Class: Celebrate American BBQ: Memphis

Memphis, Tennessee, is nationally known for Graceland, the home of Elvis Presley, blues on Beale Street and some of the world’s best barbecue. In fact, the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest is held annually in Memphis. However, like many regions known for barbecue, if you ask 20 people where to find the best, you’ll probably get 20 different answers. If you can’t make it to Memphis, these mouthwatering recipes will hold you over.

Though beef or pork ribs can be used for terrific results, traditionally Memphis barbecue is pork. Memphis is known for its dry barbecue, with sauces served on the side. Dry rubs incorporate flavors like garlic, cumin and paprika. Barbecue sauces feature a variety of spices and tend to be tomato and vinegar based. While dry rubs impart incredible flavors to the ribs on their own, the key to amazing Memphis-style ribs is the smoke. To ensure terrific ribs, use the highest-quality meat, seasonings and wood chips you can find.

Selecting Ribs

Pigs have 14 rib bones, which are divided into three common cuts: baby back ribs, spareribs and country-style ribs.

Baby back ribs: Nearest the backbone, these ribs are curved and close together. Most of the meat is from the loin muscle and is on top of the bones. A good butcher can custom-cut baby back ribs for you with ½ to 1 inch of extra meat. Because they are essentially covered with loin meat, baby back ribs are more tender than spareribs.

Spareribs: Moving further down the rib cage of the pig, below the baby back ribs, the bones of the rib cage get flatter and wider apart with meat between the bones; these are known as spareribs. According to the USDA, a slab of spareribs is required to have at least 11 bones. Spareribs tend to be fattier with less meat, as the meat is determined by nature and not by the butcher’s cut. The bones and extra fat of the spareribs make them full of flavor, but these ribs take longer to cook. They are most flavorful and tender when prepared using long, slow cooking methods such as smoking, steam-roasting or braising.

A full sparerib slab has a rounded end where the slab would connect with the breastbone. When this slab is squared off, it is known as St. Louis–cut ribs.

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Ingredients for Hush Puppies

1 quart canola oil

1½ cups fine cornmeal

1 cup all-purpose flour

½ tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. baking soda

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

Pinch of cayenne pepper

2 eggs

1½ cups buttermilk

¼ cup thinly sliced green onions,
white and light green portions

Ingredients for Bryan Voltaggio’s One-Hour Memphis-Style Ribs

¼ cup kosher salt

2 Tbs. freshly ground pepper

Zest of 1 lemon

1 Tbs. paprika

1½ tsp. garlic powder

1½ tsp. fresh oregano leaves, minced

1½ tsp. piment d’Espelette

¾ tsp. fresh thyme leaves, minced

½ tsp. ground allspice

¾ tsp. celery seed

1½ tsp. toasted and ground coriander
seed

1½ tsp. toasted and ground fennel
seed

1½ cups water

¼ cup Sir Kensington’s scooping
ketchup

3½ lb. pork baby back ribs, cut into
3- or 4-bone slabs

Tips for Rib Prep

Remove the membrane: Flip the ribs over so the backside is up. Slide a sharp knife under the corner of the thin membrane that covers the backside of the rack, then grab a corner of the membrane and rip it off (you can also use a paper towel to grab the membrane). The ribs will cook more evenly and will be infused with more flavor, plus they’ll be easier to eat.

Steam-roast in the oven: Place the ribs in a large roasting pan, add a little water or broth and cover with aluminum foil, or loosely wrap the ribs in foil and place in the pan along with the liquid. Then steam-roast in a 250°F oven for about 1 hour. This will guarantee moist ribs.

Mix your wood chips: Don’t use all hickory chips, which can impart a bitter edge to the ribs. Instead, use a mix of hickory and oak or a fruit wood.

Use both indirect and direct heat: After steam-roasting the ribs in the oven, place them over indirect heat, cover the grill and smoke for 1 hour.

After smoking, move the ribs to the direct-heat area of the grill and increase the heat to 300° to 325°F. Cook on each side for 5 to 10 minutes. (If using sauce, which is not Memphis style, begin basting the ribs with sauce at this point.)

Don’t overcook: Some people think that once the meat has pulled back about 1 inch from the bones, the ribs are done. On the competition circuit, ribs with a lot of bone showing are called shiners. A little bone showing is okay. The best way to test for doneness is to grab the long side of the rack with tongs; if the ribs bend without resistance, they are ready to eat.

Keys to Smoking Ribs

- Don’t parboil the ribs that you’ll be smoking. It makes them tough.
- Don’t let the fire get too hot or you’ll end up with dry ribs.
- Be sure to remove the membrane from the rib slab before cooking; the membrane will prevent the smoke from penetrating the meat.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Grill Master*, by Fred Thompson (Weldon Owen, 2011).

Hush Puppies

Small cornmeal dumplings that originated in the South, hush puppies are delicious served with all types of barbecue.

Preheat an oven to 200°F.

In a saucepan over medium-high heat, heat the oil to 350°F on a deep-frying thermometer. Line a baking sheet with paper towels.

In a bowl, whisk together the cornmeal, flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, black pepper and cayenne. Add the eggs and buttermilk and whisk until the mixture is smooth and no lumps remain. Add the green onions and stir until well combined. Let the batter stand for 5 minutes.

Working in batches, use a small scoop or tablespoon to carefully drop about 1 Tbs. of the batter into the oil for each hush puppy. Fry, turning often with a slotted spoon, until the hush puppies are golden brown, 2½ to 3 minutes. Transfer them to the prepared baking sheet and keep warm in the oven while cooking the remaining hush puppies. Serve immediately. Makes about 40 hush puppies.

Williams-Sonoma Kitchen

Bryan Voltaggio’s One-Hour Memphis-Style Ribs

In a bowl, stir together the salt, pepper, lemon zest, paprika, garlic powder, oregano, piment d’Espelette, thyme, allspice, celery seed, coriander and fennel.

Prepare a grill for indirect grilling over medium-high heat. If using a gas grill, set a smoker box filled with hickory chips over direct heat.

In the base of a 10-quart stovetop pressure cooker, stir together the water, ketchup and 2 Tbs. of the spice mixture; reserve the remaining mixture. Place the ribs, bone side down, in the pressure cooker. Close and lock the lid and bring up to high pressure over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for 15 minutes. Remove from the heat and let the pressure dissipate naturally, about 10 minutes. Carefully remove the lid and transfer the ribs to a steel grill roaster set on a baking sheet. Pour the cooking sauce from the pressure cooker into a basting pot or liquid measuring cup. Brush the meaty side of the ribs with the sauce.

Set the roaster on the grill over indirect heat. Cover the grill and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, brushing the ribs every 5 minutes with the sauce. Transfer the ribs to a cutting board and sprinkle with the remaining spice mixture. Cut into individual ribs and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Recipe by Chef Bryan Voltaggio, inspired by Charles Vergos’ Rendezvous, Memphis, TN.

Country-style ribs: These are butterflied or split chops from the shoulder end or the loin. Bone-in or boneless, country-style ribs are usually quite meaty, with a moderate amount of fat. They can be grilled over direct heat using any pork chop recipe, or cooked by the long, slow method in a charcoal or gas grill. Country-style ribs are inexpensive, easy to cook and delicious.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Essentials of Grilling*, by Denis Kelly, Melanie Barnard, Barbara Grunes & Michael McLaughlin (Oxmoor House, 2003).

Memphis Mop Sauce

A mop or mopping sauce is a flavorful concoction applied generously to slow-cooked and smoked meats. The name comes from the old barbecue tradition of using a clean cotton dish mop to apply sauce to large portions of smoked meats or ribs.

In a large bowl, whisk together the vinegar, salt and sugar. Stir in the onion, red pepper flakes and black pepper. Pour into a tall container. Use immediately, or cover tightly and refrigerate for up to 1 week.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *On the Grill*, by Willie Cooper (Oxmoor House, 2009).

Memphis-Style Spareribs

In the opinion of many grill masters, including the legions of experts who trail the weekend BBQ contest circuit, Memphis is the only place to find real ribs. It’s where the contest finalists gather each year for the big rib cook-off, and it’s where enthusiasts come year-round for legendary ribs at world-famous restaurants. Ribs are done dry (dry rub, that is) in Memphis, and the sauce is served on the side.

To make the Memphis dry rub, in a small bowl, stir together the paprika, chili powder, sugar, onion powder, garlic powder, celery seeds, cumin, mustard, oregano, thyme, cayenne and salt. Use the rub immediately, or cover tightly and store at room temperature for up to 1 week.

Using your fingers, pat the dry rub evenly over the spareribs, rubbing it in well. Place in a dish in a single layer, cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 4 hours. Remove from the refrigerator 30 minutes before grilling.

Prepare a charcoal or gas grill for indirect grilling over medium heat. Oil the grill rack.

For a charcoal grill: Place a drip pan half full of water in the center of the fire bed. Sprinkle a handful of the wood chips on the coals. Place the ribs on the grill rack over the drip pan. Cover the grill and smoke the ribs, turning every 30 minutes or so and adding more wood chips, coals and water to the drip pan as needed, until the ribs are fork-tender, about 2 hours.

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For a gas grill: Place a shallow pan half full of water at the edge of the grill rack. Add the wood chips to the grill in a smoker box or perforated foil packet. Place the ribs on the grill rack away from the heat elements. Cover the grill and smoke the ribs, turning every 30 minutes or so and adding more water to the pan as needed, until the ribs are fork-tender, about 2 hours.

Pour the barbecue sauce into a saucepan and heat on the grill rack or on the stovetop, then transfer to a bowl. Transfer the slabs to a carving board and cut into separate ribs or into manageable 3- or 4-rib portions. Pass the barbecue sauce alongside. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Essentials of Grilling*, by Denis Kelly, Melanie Barnard, Barbara Grunes & Michael McLaughlin (Oxmoor House, 2003).

Memphis-Style Coleslaw

In this recipe we used homemade mayonnaise, but you can certainly use jarred. In the South, they are likely to use the grocery store brand “Duke’s.” Developed by Eugenia Duke in Greenville, South Carolina, Duke’s hasn’t changed its formula since 1917. It has no added sugar and more egg yolks that give it richness similar to homemade.

Quarter the cabbage and cut out the stem portions. Working with one section at a time, shred the cabbage, cut side down, on a mandoline fitted with the straight blade attachment set to ¼-inch thickness. You should have about 12 cups. Transfer the cabbage to a large bowl and add the carrots and bell pepper.

Holding a box grater over the bowl, grate the onion on the side with the large holes and let the onion and its juices fall into the bowl.

In another bowl, combine the egg yolks, mustard and half of the vinegar, whisking to thoroughly combine. Slowly drizzle in the oil in a thin, steady stream, whisking constantly to emulsify the oil into the egg mixture. After half of the oil has been incorporated, whisk in the remaining vinegar and then continue whisking in the remaining oil, which can now be added more quickly. Alternatively, prepare the seasoned mayonnaise in a food processor fitted with the metal blade.

Fold in the celery seeds, salt, white pepper and sugar and pour the seasoned mayonnaise over the shredded vegetables. Toss to coat all the ingredients. Cover and refrigerate for at least 3 hours before serving. Serves 8.

Recipe courtesy of The Workshop Kitchen.

Ingredients for Memphis-Style Coleslaw

1 head green cabbage, about 2¼ lb., tough outer leaves removed

2 carrots, peeled and grated on large holes of box grater (about 1 cup)

1 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and finely diced (about 1 cup)

¼ large white onion

2 egg yolks

¼ cup Dijon mustard

¼ cup cider vinegar

2 cups canola oil

1 Tbs. celery seeds

1 tsp. coarse or kosher salt

⅛ tsp. freshly ground white pepper

½ cup sugar

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