

June 26, 2011

Ingredients for Barbecue-Style Brisket

¼ cup all-purpose flour

1 tsp. salt

½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

3½ to 4 lb. beef brisket, trimmed of excess fat

¼ cup olive oil

2 yellow onions, thinly sliced

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 tsp. cayenne pepper

1 cup beef broth

½ cup red wine vinegar

⅓ cup sugar

2 Tbs. tomato paste

Ingredients for Baked Beans

2 cups dried pink beans, rinsed and drained

8 cups water

1 tsp. salt, plus more, to taste

1 Tbs. olive oil

1 yellow onion, diced

3 garlic cloves, minced

½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar

2 Tbs. dark molasses

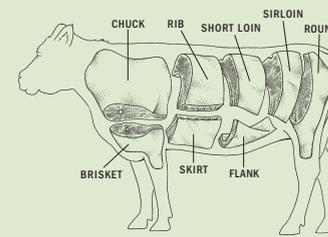
2 tsp. dry mustard

¼ cup brown mustard

2 Tbs. apple cider vinegar

Freshly ground pepper, to taste

½ lb. bacon, cooked until crispy and chopped into ½-inch pieces



Going Against the Grain

We've rubbed our brisket, then slow cooked it to perfection over many hours with much smoke and love. Now it's time to eat, right? Wrong. The meat must be sliced into manageable mouthfuls.

Brisket is one of the muscles in the steer that gets a lot of work. Those muscles are filled with fibers and when cooked, are referred to as the grain. While the connective tissue will break down with long, slow cooking and the muscle fibers will soften, they can still be chewy.

Think about holding a cooked flank steak. If you pull on the long ends of the steak, it is virtually impossible to pull off a piece. However, if you turn the meat 90 degrees so that you are holding the short side of the steak, it is much easier to pull off a piece. This is why almost every brisket recipe says to slice thinly against the grain. The shorter you can make the fibers, the easier they will be to chew.

Burnt Ends

There was a time when pit masters set aside the tougher, drier, oddly shaped end pieces as they sliced briskets, or even trimmed off a bit of edge from the choice fattiest parts and offered these scraps to customers while they waited. Maybe these proffered nuggets weren't so beautiful, but they were loaded with flavor and became enormously popular.

Now a staple menu item, pit masters can't rely on the refuse of a whole brisket to feed their crowds but must cut chunks exclusively to be resmoked into burnt ends.

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Technique Class: Celebrate American BBQ: Texas and Kansas City

What makes Texas and Kansas City barbecue different from the Carolinas and Memphis? It's the beef! While pork, chicken and goat (Texas) and sometimes fish (Kansas City) can be found there, on most barbecue pits beef rules, and brisket is king.

Being as huge as it is, Texas has regional variations throughout the state. In Eastern Texas barbecue is served with thick sauces, while in Central Texas the sauce is served on the side, but the meat is rubbed with dry or wet rubs and possibly basted with mops. Although preparations may differ among the regions, two commonalities prevail: using high-quality meat and serving packaged white bread alongside.

A railroad town, Kansas City was once the home to seven meatpacking houses that offered a great variety of meat for barbecuing. The meat in Kansas City is generally smoked with hickory and then slathered with a thick molasses-tomato based sauce.

What Is Brisket?

Brisket is a large, boneless muscle cut from under the shoulder of the steer. Since the muscle gets a lot of use, it is full of connective tissue and collagen and must be cooked for a long time to become tender. Brisket, although boneless, has a wonderful beefy flavor. It is sold whole or in smaller pieces. The long brisket is cut in half and you will find it packaged as flat cut or point cut. The flat cut is leaner, while the point cut has more fat. The cap of fat found on the point cut is referred to as the deckle. Try to get a piece of brisket that includes the succulent deckle. Contrary to the usual practice when selecting meat, look for brisket with as much fat as possible, since the fat bastes the meat and keeps it juicy during long cooking times. You can cut away most of the fat before serving.

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

Making a Rub

Rub: A spice and/or herb mixture, a rub is applied to the outside surface of foods before cooking. Rubs can be completely dry or incorporate some liquids or fats, in which case they are called wet rubs or pastes. Rubs are most often used in barbecuing and grilling because of their ability to adhere to meats when grilled or smoked. When applying a rub, add it thoroughly and don't skimp on the amount. Then refrigerate the food and let it absorb the spices, from 30 minutes for fish and shrimp to overnight for large cuts of beef and pork.

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Barbecue-Style Brisket

Serve the barbecue brisket alongside homemade or good-quality purchased potato salad or mashed potatoes. Leftover brisket is perfect piled high on large seeded buns.

On a large plate, stir together the flour, salt and black pepper. Coat the brisket evenly with the flour mixture, shaking off the excess; reserve the remaining flour mixture. In a large fry pan over high heat, warm the oil. Add the brisket, fattier side down, and cook until browned underneath, about 7 minutes. Turn the brisket over and brown the other side, about 7 minutes more. Transfer the brisket, fat side up, to a slow cooker.

Pour off all but about 1 Tbs. fat from the fry pan and return the pan to medium-high heat. Add the onions, garlic and cayenne and sauté until the onions begin to turn translucent, 2 to 3 minutes. Stir in the reserved flour mixture and cook for 1 minute more. Pour in the broth and vinegar. Raise the heat to high, bring to a boil and deglaze the pan, stirring to scrape up the browned bits on the pan bottom. Add the sugar and tomato paste and stir until evenly blended. Pour over the brisket.

Cover and cook until the meat is very tender when pierced, 3 to 4 hours on high or 6 to 8 hours on low. Transfer the brisket to a cutting board, cover with foil and let rest for 10 minutes. Skim the fat off the sauce. Slice the meat across the grain and spoon the sauce on top. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma Food Made Fast Series, *Slow Cooker*, by Norman Kolpas (Oxmoor House, 2007).

Baked Beans

Smooth and reddish-brown in color, pink beans are similar to pinto beans but are smaller and rounder. This recipe calls for an electric pressure cooker to shorten the cooking time. Serve the baked beans alongside brisket.

In an electric pressure cooker, combine the beans, water and the 1 tsp. salt. Cover and cook on high for 50 minutes according to the manufacturer's instructions. Release the pressure. Transfer the beans and their liquid to a large bowl. Set aside.

In a Dutch oven over medium-high heat, warm the olive oil. Add the onion and cook until soft and translucent, 5 to 7 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the brown sugar, molasses, dry mustard, brown mustard, vinegar, salt and pepper and stir until the brown sugar has dissolved. Stir in the bacon.

Strain the cooked beans into another large bowl, reserving the cooking liquid. Add the beans to the onion mixture and stir to combine. Slowly stir in 2 to 2½ cups of the reserved liquid. Set the Dutch oven over low heat, cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 1 hour. Partially uncover the beans and continue simmering, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has thickened, about 30 minutes more; do not allow the liquid to evaporate completely. Serve immediately. Serves 8.

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Dry Rubs: Made with spices and herbs, dry rubs are rubbed into the meat. When the food is refrigerated overnight, the rub helps to break down the meat fibers and tenderize it, and the spices flavor the meat. The meat is then served with sauce “on the side.” A dry rub is great on food that will be cooked faster using direct heat (at a higher temperature, like on a gas grill) and on food that won’t tenderize much, like shrimp, chicken breasts and steaks.

Wet Rubs: These are dry rubs that have been made into a thick paste using liquid or fat. The paste is rubbed into and on top of the meat and often refrigerated overnight. The paste needs to be thick enough to adhere to the food but thin enough to smear easily. For best results, apply a wet rub generously and use a slow-cooking method to ensure the meat is flavored throughout. Ribs, pork and bone-in chicken benefit from a wet rub; they draw moisture in from the rub while charring the outside.

All-Purpose BBQ Rub

This all-purpose spice rub for slow and low barbecue cooking goes great with pork or beef ribs; pork tenderloin; flank, skirt or hanger steak; and chicken or turkey.

In a small container with a tight-fitting lid, stir together the granulated sugar, brown sugar, paprika, chili powder, cayenne and smoked paprika. Add the salt and several grinds of black pepper. Cover and shake vigorously. Use immediately, or store in a cool, dark place for up to 1 month. Makes about ²/₃ cup.

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

Michael Voltaggio’s Texas Short Ribs

In a small bowl, stir together the BBQ seasoning, sea salt and granulated honey.

Rub the short ribs all over with the oil and coat completely with about 6 Tbs. of the spice mixture; reserve the remaining mixture.

Pour the beer into the base of a 10-quart stovetop pressure cooker and add the short ribs. Close and lock the lid and bring up to high pressure over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for 1 hour. Remove from the heat. To release the pressure, run cold water over the lid, then remove the lid. Transfer the ribs to a steel grill fry pan and reserve the cooking sauce.

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.

Set the fry pan on the grill over indirect heat. Cover the grill and cook for 10 minutes. Turn the ribs over, cover the grill and cook for 10 minutes more, adding additional hickory chips as needed.

Transfer the ribs to a cutting board, cover loosely with aluminum foil and let rest for 10 minutes. Thinly slice the ribs and mop with some of the cooking sauce. Sprinkle with the remaining spice mixture, if desired. Serve immediately with white sandwich bread, cheddar cheese and extra sauce for dipping. Serves 4 to 6.

Recipe by Chef Michael Voltaggio, inspired by Smitty’s Market, Lockhart, TX

Oven-Smoked Brisket with Bourbon-Honey Mop

Open the windows during the first hour or so of smoking the brisket so the smell doesn’t linger. An instant-read thermometer—preferably a probe thermometer—is crucial here. Sometimes the temperature of the meat will stall at 155° or 165°F for up to an hour. This is just a sign that the collagen is breaking down to create tender, juicy meat, so don’t be tempted to increase the oven temperature.

Remove the racks from the oven and preheat it to 475°F. In a large aluminum foil roasting pan, thinly distribute 2 handfuls of dry oak or mesquite wood chips. On the chips, place a rack that will elevate a large baking dish for the meat at least 1 inch above the chips.

In a small bowl, stir together the mild chili powder, sugar, onion powder, garlic powder, mustard, hot chili powder, salt and pepper. Rub the brisket all over with the oil, then rub with the spice mixture.

In the large baking dish, place a second, shallower rack. Set the dish on the rack in the foil roasting pan. Pour the water into the baking dish. Place the meat, fat side up, on the rack. The water should not touch the meat.

Wrap both the roasting pan and the baking dish holding the meat with heavy-duty foil. Crimp the edges of the foil firmly so that it will hold in as much smoke as possible. Place directly on the floor of the oven and cook the meat for 35 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 225°F and cook for 4 hours more.

Meanwhile, prepare the mop: In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Stir in the vinegar and water.

Remove the foil from the pan and dish. Insert an ovenproof meat thermometer into the thickest part of the brisket. Brush the meat with the mop and continue to cook, brushing every 40 minutes or so, until the internal temperature reaches 190°F, 2 to 3 hours. If the temperature has not reached 190°F after a total cooking time of 7½ hours, increase the oven temperature to 300°F and continue to cook the meat.

To the remaining mop, stir in the bourbon, honey, mustard and ketchup. Turn on the broiler. Brush the meat with the bourbon-honey mixture. Broil, brushing the meat occasionally, until the top is crusty and dark brown, 5 to 15 minutes. Watch carefully to make sure that the meat does not char.

Remove the meat from the oven and let stand for 10 minutes. Cut into thick or thin slices and serve immediately. The brisket can be wrapped in foil and held for up to 1½ hours.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *The Cook & The Butcher*, by Brigit Binns (Weldon Owen, 2011).

Ingredients for Oven-Smoked Brisket with Bourbon-Honey Mop

1 tsp. mild chili powder

1 tsp. sugar

1 tsp. onion powder

1 tsp. garlic powder

1 tsp. dry mustard

½ tsp. hot chili powder

2 tsp. kosher salt

1 Tbs. freshly ground pepper

5 lb. flat-cut brisket, lightly trimmed of excess fat

2 tsp. canola oil

1 cup water

For the mop:

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

3 Tbs. white vinegar

3 Tbs. water

1 Tbs. bourbon

1 Tbs. honey

1 Tbs. Dijon mustard

1 Tbs. tomato ketchup

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