

The 3 Secrets of BBQ Rib Success

The Layman's Guide to BBQ Excellence



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- If you're a BBQ rib fanatic, you know excellence when you taste it. Soft meat that falls off the bone and melts in your mouth. Nicely charred but not burnt, with great BBQ flavor but not drowning in sauce. Little bones and almost no fat. Let's face it, great BBQ ribs should be the heart and soul of any [Labor Day](#) grill fest. The true BBQ masters of the world will tell you-and rightfully so-that the best way to make any kind of BBQ meat is by smoking it over low heat for a long, long time. The problem is that most normal folks don't have the available hours, the patience, or the gear to do it that way. So we mere mortals are left to our own devices, and forced to come up with other methods.

With that in mind, here are 3 secrets to making the best BBQ ribs in your neighborhood, while turning yourself into the acknowledged rib master of your domain. We will cover prepping the ribs, making your own blended BBQ sauce, and then the actual 2-step cooking process.

Prepping The Ribs

A good rib dinner starts with true, imported pork baby back ribs-they have a more delicate bone structure and less fat. Domestic Kansas City style ribs have much larger rib bones and a higher content of chewy tissue and gristle. A slab of imported baby backs is also shaped differently, with shorter rib bones and a longer overall length. The Kansas City style ribs are much larger, all around. So make sure you are using pork baby back ribs.

Before cooking, there are several steps required to ensure flavorful and perfectly grilled ribs. You need to prep the ribs, and then rub them.

1. Wash and Peel the ribs.

After you remove the ribs from the packaging, thoroughly rinse them under cold, running water. The next step, one of the most important, and the one that most people neglect, is to remove the fat membrane from the back side of the ribs. This whitish, filmy, membrane completely covers the underside of the rib rack. If left in place, it melts during cooking, adding no flavor but lots of grease to the ribs. To get rid of it, slide a knife between a rib and the film, and then simply peel it off. It should come off in a complete piece. If doesn't, just make sure you get the bulk of it. After you've peeled the ribs, pat them lightly with a paper towel, and set them aside.

2. Prepare the rub mixture.

Rubbing the ribs with a spice mixture adds a base of flavor, and provides the foundation for the sauce later on. You have a lot of options for the rub itself, including a commercial BBQ rub, or one you make yourself. Making your own rub gives you complete control, and it's fun to experiment with different variations. Here's a basic formula.

Rib rub Ingredients: Sea Salt, Fresh ground pepper, Garlic powder, Onion powder. You can also use these optional additions-Old Bay Seasoning, Paprika, Cayenne, Cumin, or any other dry spice . Using equal amounts of the selected spices, mix the dry ingredients in a small bowl simply using your finger to blend them. If you are using any of the optional ingredients, modify the amounts based on the intensity-or heat-of the particular spice.

3. Rub the ribs.

Using your hands-BBQ pros wear gloves when doing this step-rub the spice mixture all over each rack of ribs. You don't necessarily want to be gentle here either. Rather than sprinkling the mixture on top of the meat, thoroughly rub it in to the meat on both sides of each rack. Cover the ribs, and set them aside.

Prepping The Sauce

Particularly if time is of the essence, it might seem much quicker to simply pick up one of the hundreds-if not thousands-of BBQ sauces available at your grocery or cooking store. But creating your own blend is fun and will offer up a truly unique rib experience. It will also give you bragging rights when friends ask where you got the sauce and you proudly tell them it's your own recipe.

1. Define yourself.

BBQ sauce is one of those things that define the BBQ chef's personality. And since your sauce is a reflection of you, make sure that it says something unique and expressive about you. It's also a good idea to make sure it tastes good, but that's a given. There are of course zillions of perfectly good commercial sauces available on store shelves everywhere. But why stop there? Combine some basic ingredients to create your own master blend. If people rave about it, you might even have the makings of a new business venture at your fingertips.

2. Blend your sauce.

Here are some ingredients for a nice, mild BBQ sauce that combines some simple flavors into a catchy concoction. You'll also find the reasons for each ingredient, which might help you to create your own. This recipe will be plenty for up to 10 racks of ribs.

BBQ Sauce Ingredients

(1) 400z. bottle, basic BBQ sauce, plain, such as Kraft-this is the base for your sauce, and any commercially available brand will do. The Kraft product is mild and consistent and provides an excellent foundation for more dramatic flavor additions.

(1/2) bottle, Kikkoman's Teriyaki sauce-this adds a salty flair to the basic sauce, and a more complex flavor.

(5) oz. honey-the sweetness of the honey not only provides an intriguing offset to the teriyaki, but it also caramelizes beautifully when grilled. Be careful though not to overdo it-too much honey and the ribs will taste sugary.

Pour all of the ingredients into a stainless steel bowl, and whisk thoroughly. Again, this is a basic sauce. Feel free to experiment and to create your own unique blend. Set the mixture aside.

Cook and Finish The Ribs

Okay, here's where we bring it all together. The ribs are prepped and rubbed. The sauce is ready to go. Let's start by remembering the BBQ pro's admonition that great ribs must be smoked to be good. The reason for this is simple-smoking is a low-heat, indirect method of cooking. When properly smoked, meat turns out moist, tender-and very flavorful. We've also agreed though that most people don't have the time or the gear to do it right. That's why many outdoor chefs just toss the ribs on the grill and hope it turns out okay. It won't, and here's why.

Raw pork takes too long to cook properly over a hot grill, so it winds up burning. Add BBQ sauce to the mix and you get a charred, encrusted mess that nobody really enjoys. So here's a two step process that will work every time.

1. Steam the ribs.

This step will elevate you to BBQ rib greatness. It takes awhile, but it's well worth every second. Since most people don't have a dedicated steamer, a large pot works just as well. Simply invert a colander in the bottom, and add about 4 inches of cold water. You do not want to immerse the ribs, because that will boil them and remove flavor. Find a way to keep them out of the water so the steam cooks them instead.

The size of the pot will dictate how you place the ribs. If the pot is big enough, stack the individual racks on the colander in the bottom, layering each rack at a 90 angle to each other. In a big pot, you can also stack them vertically, around the sides of the pot. Another approach is to cut each rack in half, and then stack them on the colander, as outlined above.

Cover the pot and bring the water to a boil. Steam the ribs for an hour and a half, to two hours. Three things are happening here. The ribs are cooking, the fat is being removed, and the flavors of the rub are being infused into the meat. Don't rush this part of the process.

Once the ribs have been steaming for an hour, light a hot grill.

2. Grill the ribs.

Since this is the only part your guests will probably see, the end result is decidedly good and deceptively simple. Only you will know how much effort and care you put into the process.

After the ribs have finished steaming, remove them from the pot to a covered pan. About 15 minutes or so before it's time to eat, wipe down your hot grill with olive oil and let the fun begin.

First, place the individual racks of ribs on the hot grill, but do not add sauce. Grill for about 4 minutes per side, and then flip each rack. This step gives a nice char to the meat and brings out the flavor of the rub. After the first turn, using a sauce mop or a brush and your secret BBQ sauce recipe, liberally coat the side of the racks that was grilled first. After about 4 more minutes, flip the racks again, and coat the other side with sauce. Wait another 4 minutes and flip the ribs one last time. Once you break out the sauce for the first time, feel free to apply some more as the ribs finish cooking. But when you remove the ribs from the grill, you should see caramelized-not runny-BBQ sauce.

If you've followed the instructions, each side will have been on the grill for 2 four-minute shifts, one without sauce and one with. This process will gently char the meat and caramelize the sauce without burning anything.

That's it-time to eat ribs.

It's fun to have your guests line up at grill so you can place each perfect rack right on their plates-the compliments will flow graciously. Serve the ribs with your choice of appropriate BBQ dinner accompaniments, extra helpings of your special BBQ sauce and plenty of napkins or paper towels. And don't forget to put out a bone bowl for the convenience of your guests.

Enjoy your ribs!