

Amazing Ribs

What you'll need:

1 grill with a cover. You can use a dedicated smoker or any charcoal grill or gas grill as long as it has a cover. A tight fitting cover with adjustable vents like those on the Weber Kettle is best.

1 (18 pound) bag of charcoal for charcoal grills or smokers. You won't use all that charcoal, but have a full bag on hand. Hardwood lump is best, but regular briquets will do fine. Absolutely do not use the instant igniting stuff that has solvent in it

1 tank of propane for gas cookers. You won't need it all, but, until you get the hang of this technique, don't risk running out by starting with a partial tank.

8 ounces by weight of hardwood chunks, chips, or pellets. It doesn't matter how many slabs you are cooking, 8 ounces should be enough. I prefer chunks of apple, oak, or hickory for pork. Never use any kind of pine unless you want meat that tastes like turpentine. Never use construction lumber because it is often treated with poisonous chemicals to discourage rot and termites. You do not need to soak the wood. Wood does not absorb much water. That's why they make boats with it.

1 pair of long handled tongs

1 sauce brush

1 good digital oven thermometer

1 slab of Hilltop Pastures spare ribs. That's 1/2 slab per adult. You'll probably have leftovers, but what's wrong with that? FYI - Country ribs come from the shoulder and are not really ribs, so don't use them for this recipe.

3 tablespoons olive oil

4 tablespoons of Memphis Dust

1 cup of your signature homemade barbecue sauce or a good commercial barbecue sauce

How to cook em'

1) Rinse. Rinse the ribs in cool water. Pat dry with paper towels.

2) Skin 'n' trim. Remove the membrane from the back side. There can be a lot of fat under there and you want to scrape some of it off. Insert a butter knife under the membrane, then your fingers, work a section loose, grip it with a paper towel, and peel it off. Finally, trim the excess fat from both sides. If you can't get the skin off, with a sharp knife, cut slashes through it every inch so some of the fat will render out during the cooking.

3) Rub. Coat the meat with a thin layer of oil because most of the flavorings in the rub are oil soluble, not water soluble. The oil should help the flavor get into the surface and makes for a better crust. A lot of seasoned barbecue cooks use a base of mustard, but I think oil works better. Sprinkle enough rub to coat all surfaces but not so much that the meat doesn't show through. That is about 2 tablespoons per side depending on the size of the slab. Many of the herbs and spices in the rub are oil soluble, so the oil will help them penetrate a little better. Spread the rub on the meat, rub it in, and let it sit in the fridge for about an hour. The night before works great too, if you have time.

4) Setup your cooker for indirect cooking with 2 zones. That means that one side is hot and the other is not. If you have a gas grill, use only one burner. Put a disposable aluminum pan filled with a few inches of water on top of the burner that is off. Moisture and combustion gasses in a propane grill combine to create a seductive, bacon-like flavor in the meat. If it has only one burner, put the water pan between the meat and the burner. If you have a charcoal grill, start a

full chimney, about 75 briquets, push the coals to one side. You can use a water pan, but it is not necessary.

5) Adjust the temp. Preheat your cooker to about 225°F and try to keep it there throughout the cook. Adjust the air *intake* dampers at the bottom to control heat on charcoal grills. Intake dampers are more effective than exhaust dampers for controlling the temp because they reduce the supply of oxygen to the coals. Take your time getting the temp right. Cooking at 225°F will allow the meat to roast low and slow, liquefying the collagen in connective tissues and melting fats without getting the proteins knotted in a bunch. It's a magic temp that creates silky texture, adds moisture, and keeps the meat tender. If you can't hit 225°F, get as close as you can. Don't go under 200°F and try not to go over 250°F.

6) Smoke. For charcoal or gas cookers, add 4 ounces of wood at this time. On a gas grill, put the wood right as close to the flame as possible. On a charcoal grill, put it right on the hot coals. *Resist the temptation to add more wood.* Nothing will ruin a meal faster and waste money better than overcooked meat. You can always add more the next time you cook, but you cannot take it away if you overcook.

7) Relax. Put the slabs in the cooker on the cooler side of the grill, meaty side up. Close the lid and leave it alone to cook.

8) More smoke. When the smoke disappears after 20-30 minutes, add another 2 ounces of wood. After the first hour, stop adding wood. Adding wood at the beginning of the cook allows better penetration before the meat surface seals itself. If you have more than one slab on, halfway through the cook you will need to move the ribs closest to the fire away from the heat, and the slabs far from the flame in closer. Leave the meat side up. There is no need to flip the slabs. Otherwise, keep your lid on. Opening the lid just upsets the delicate balance of heat, moisture, and oxygen inside your cooker. It can also significantly lengthen the cooking time. No peeking. If you're lookin', you ain't cookin'.

9) The bend test. After about 5-6 hours, the exact time will depend on how thick the slabs are and how steady you have kept the temp. Check to see if they are ready. I like the bend test (a.k.a. the bounce test). Pick up the slab with tongs and bounce them. If the surface cracks and is almost ready to break, it is ready.

11) Sauce. Now paint both sides with your favorite home made barbecue sauce or storebought sauce and put it back in to bake the sauce on. Better still, move the slab directly over the hottest part of the grill in order to caramelize and crisp the sauce. With the lid open so you don't roast the meat from above, sizzle the sauce on one side and then the other. One coat of a thick sauce should be enough, but if you need two, go ahead, but no more! Don't hide all the fabulous flavors under too much sauce. If you think you'll want more sauce, put some in a bowl on the table.

If you've done all this right, you will notice that there is a thin pink layer beneath the surface of the meat. This does not mean it is undercooked! It is the highly prized *smoke ring* caused by the combustion gases and the smoke. It is a sign of Amazing Ribs. Now be ready to take a bow when the applause swells from the audience.