

—On— FIRE!

The barbecue world isn't just a boys' club, thanks to these top pitmasters. Try these recipes in your own backyard!



Melissa Cookston HORN LAKE, MS Memphis Barbecue Co.

When she started dating her now husband, Melissa Cookston fell in love—with barbecue. “He took me to watch a competition and I was hooked,” she says. She signed up for her first cook-off a few months later and eventually became the first woman to win the World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest in Memphis, TN, twice! These days, Melissa is the pitmaster at Mississippi’s Memphis Barbecue Co., where she’s much more serious about the quality of the meat than the table manners: “We give you permission to play with your food, stick it in your face and lick sauce off your hands,” she says. memphisbbqco.com



MEMPHIS-STYLE BABY BACK RIBS

ACTIVE: 1 hr | TOTAL: 6 hr | SERVES: 4 to 6

FOR THE RUB

- 1 cup turbinado sugar
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ½ cup kosher salt
- ⅓ cup Hungarian paprika
- ¼ cup ancho chile powder
- 2 tablespoons granulated garlic
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons mustard powder
- 1½ teaspoons cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- Freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE RIBS

- 2 racks baby back ribs (2 to 2½ pounds each)
- 2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- ¼ cup apple juice

FOR THE BARBECUE SAUCE AND GLAZE

- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 1½ cups ketchup
- ¾ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
- 6 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons mustard powder
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Freshly ground black pepper

YOU'LL ALSO NEED:

1 to 2 cups applewood chips

- 1.** Make the rub: Whisk the turbinado sugar, brown sugar, salt, paprika, ancho powder, granulated garlic, onion powder, mustard powder, cayenne, cumin and 1 teaspoon black pepper in a medium bowl.
- 2.** Preheat a grill to medium low and prepare for indirect cooking: On a gas grill, preheat the grill, then turn off half the burners. On a charcoal grill, light the coals, then bank to one side; put a disposable aluminum drip pan on the unlit side of the grill under the grates. Meanwhile, soak the wood chips in water, 30 minutes; drain.
- 3.** Make the ribs: Turn the ribs bone-side up. Slip a paring knife between the thin membrane and the bone to loosen, then pull off the membrane; trim any excess fat. Season both sides of the racks with the rub (about ½ tablespoon per side). Transfer to a roasting pan, bone-side down, and let sit 30 minutes.

Pro pitmasters often use large wood chunks instead of chips—the flavor is stronger. If you're using chunks, keep in mind that you don't need to soak them, and you should only use them on charcoal grills, not gas.

4. When the grill registers 250°, add the wood chips: On a gas grill, fill a smoker box with the chips and use according to the manufacturer's instructions; on a charcoal grill, sprinkle the chips over the coals. Place the ribs bone-side down on the cooler side of the grill. Cover the grill and smoke the ribs for 2 hours (if using charcoal, adjust the air vents and add more coals as needed so the temperature stays around 250°).

5. While the ribs are smoking, lay out 2 long sheets of heavy-duty aluminum foil (or double pieces of regular foil). Spread ½ tablespoon each of the rub, brown sugar and maple syrup down the center of each piece of foil.

6. Place the ribs, meat-side down, on the prepared foil, then top each rack with another ½ tablespoon each of the rub, brown sugar and maple syrup. Fold the foil over the ribs and crimp the edges, leaving one side open; pour 2 tablespoons apple juice into each packet and crimp the final edge to seal. Return to the grill and cook until the meat is tender, 2 to 2½ more hours.

7. Meanwhile, make the barbecue sauce: Heat the canola oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Add the garlic and cook, stirring, until golden, about 2 minutes. Add the ketchup, ½ cup honey, the tomato paste, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar, mustard powder, cayenne and 1 teaspoon black pepper. Bring to a low boil, whisking, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Whisk in ½ cup water and simmer 5 minutes. Stir in ¼ cup of the rub until dissolved; season with more of the rub, 1 tablespoon at a time, if needed. Let cool.

8. Make the glaze: Whisk ¾ cup of the barbecue sauce with the remaining ¼ cup honey. Set aside the rest of the barbecue sauce for serving.

9. Carefully remove the ribs from the foil; return to the grill, meat-side up. Brush with the glaze and continue to cook for 5 minutes. Transfer to a cutting board and slice. For “muddy style,” sprinkle with more of the rub. Serve with the remaining barbecue sauce.



Melanie Dunia RALEIGH, NC

The Pit

Melanie Dunia didn't know much about barbecuing when she was hired as a sous chef at The Pit in 2013, but her experience working in Asian restaurants turned out to be a real help: On one of her first days, The Pit's head chef asked her to roll a couple hundred of the restaurant's beloved BBQ Soul Rolls—North Carolina-style pulled pork, collards and carrots in an egg roll wrapper. "They were so impressed, but it was nothing for me!" she says. In just a few years she shot to the top spot in the kitchen and became the only woman in the region running a pit. thepit-raleigh.com

NORTH CAROLINA-STYLE PULLED PORK

ACTIVE: 1½ hr | TOTAL: 9 hr | SERVES: 15 to 20

- 1 10- to 12-pound skin-on, bone-in pork butt
- 3 cups apple cider vinegar
- 2½ tablespoons hot sauce (such as Texas Pete's)
- 2½ tablespoons sugar
- 2½ tablespoons red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Soft hamburger buns, for serving

1. Preheat a grill to medium low and prepare for indirect cooking: On a gas grill, preheat the grill, then turn off the center burners. On a charcoal grill, light the coals, then push to the edges of the grill, creating an open space in the middle; put a disposable aluminum drip pan in the middle of the grill under the grates.

2. When the grill registers 250°, place the pork on the grill grates over the cooler part. Cover the grill and cook the pork until the skin is crisp, the meat easily falls off the bone and a thermometer inserted into the center of the pork (away from the bone) registers 190° to 200°, 7 to 10 hours (if using charcoal, adjust the air vents and add more coals as needed so the temperature stays around 250°).

3. Meanwhile, make the barbecue sauce: Combine 1 cup water, the vinegar, hot sauce, sugar, red pepper flakes, 2½ tablespoons salt and 2 teaspoons black pepper in a pot. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the sugar and salt dissolve. Let cool.

4. If using a gas grill, turn off the heat and carefully transfer the pork to a cutting board. If using a charcoal grill, do this quickly, as the grease may cause the coals to catch fire. Let the pork rest at least 30 minutes, then pull the meat off the bone with tongs and a large fork; discard the bones and any large pieces of fat. Chop the crispy skin and stir into the meat. Transfer to a bowl and toss with 1 to 2 cups of the barbecue sauce. Serve on buns with the remaining sauce.



Lee Ann Whippen TAMPA, FL

Deviled Pig

Florida doesn't have its own barbecue style, but if anyone can change that, it'll be Lee Ann Whippen. In 1996, she became a certified Kansas City Barbecue Society judge alongside her dad, Jim "Trim" Tabb, and she's been manning the pit in restaurants and competing in barbecue championships ever since. She was also the first winner of *BBQ Brawl: Flay V. Symon!* At her Tampa restaurant, she gives Floridian classics the barbecue treatment: The namesake deviled pig is a spin on Tampa's famous deviled crab croquettes. deviledpig.com

WHIPPEN: TAMPA MAGAZINE TOMANETZ: WYATT MCSPADDEN TURNER: ANDREW THOMAS LEE

APPLEWOOD-SMOKED CHICKEN

ACTIVE: 45 min | TOTAL: 3 hr (plus 6 hr brining) | SERVES: 2 to 4

- 2 cups apple cider
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ cup packed dark brown sugar
- ½ cup kosher salt
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 3½-pound whole chicken
- 3 tablespoons sweet-smoky dry rub (such as Trim Tabb's Pig Powder)

YOU'LL ALSO NEED:

1 to 2 cups applewood chips

1. Make the brine: Whisk 2 cups water, the apple cider, vinegar, brown sugar, salt and honey in a medium saucepan until the sugar and salt dissolve. Add the bay leaves. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Transfer to a large glass bowl or other heatproof container and refrigerate until cooled, 1 to 2 hours.

2. Add the chicken to the brine, making sure it is completely submerged. Refrigerate at least 6 hours or overnight.

3. Preheat a grill to medium low and prepare for indirect cooking: On a gas grill, preheat the grill, then turn off half the burners. On a charcoal grill, light the coals, then bank to one side; put a disposable aluminum drip pan under the grates on the unlit side of the grill. Meanwhile, soak the applewood chips in water, 30 minutes; drain.

4. Remove the chicken from the brine and rinse with cold water. Pat dry with paper towels and generously sprinkle all over with the dry rub.

5. When the grill registers 275°, add the wood chips: On a gas grill, fill a smoker box with the chips and use according to the manufacturer's instructions; on a charcoal grill, sprinkle the chips over the coals. Place



the chicken breast-side down on the cooler side of the grill. Cover the grill and smoke the chicken until the meat is no longer pink around the bone and a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thighs registers 175°, about 2 hours (if using charcoal, adjust the air vents and add more coals as needed so the temperature stays around 275°).

6. Transfer the chicken to a cutting board and let rest at least 15 minutes before carving.

Pit Stops Here are a few more women making legendary 'cue.

Tootsie Tomanetz

Snow's BBQ  LEXINGTON, TX

This 85-year-old Barbecue Hall of Famer still wakes up before dawn every Saturday and heads to her pit at Snow's BBQ, where she serves classic Texas brisket and ribs. Customers begin lining up at 5 a.m., and the restaurant usually sells out before noon. snowsbbq.com



Jiyeon Lee

Heirloom Market BBQ  ATLANTA

Jiyeon Lee has become famous in Georgia for mixing traditional Texas-style barbecue with flavors from her childhood in Korea, like kimchi coleslaw. But that's not all she's famous for: In the '80s, Jiyeon was one of Korea's hottest K-Pop stars and produced four number-one albums! heirloommarketbbq.com



Helen Turner

Helen's BBQ  BROWNSVILLE, TN

Helen Turner has been running the pit at her restaurant for more than two decades. Regulars call her Ms. Helen, and they come from all over for her purist barbecue. She cooks most meats the same way, smoking them for hours over hickory and oak coals. (731) 779-3255

