



Elizabeth Karmel's North-Carolina Pulled Pork

August 31, 2023

Pulled Pork is characterized by meltingly tender meat seasoned by smoke and slow cooking—It is the very essence of Barbecue. In my North-Carolina Style recipe, the pork is seasoned with a Western North Carolina-style barbecue sauce that is popularized by the Lexington, North Carolina, barbecue joints. The main difference is the addition of ketchup which adds a red tint to the sauce. I make mine with a fruity apple-cider vinegar, three kinds of pepper and 2 kinds of sugar to add dimension to the tangy vinegar-based sauce.

Serves 10-20, depending on appetite

Ingredients:

Hickory or Apple wood chips, soaked in water for 30 minutes

- 1 Pork Butt, Boston Butt or untrimmed pork shoulder roast, 7 to 10 pounds
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper or your favorite BBQ Rub
Extra-virgin olive oil
Lexington-Style BBQ Sauce (see below)
North Carolina Coleslaw (see below), optional
- 1 package plain white hamburger or potato buns

Method:

1. Prepare either a charcoal or gas grill for indirect cooking.
2. Remove pork from wrapper. Do not trim any excess fat off the meat, this fat will naturally baste the meat and keep it moist during the long cooking time. Brush pork with a thin coating of oil. Season with salt and pepper or barbecue rub. Set aside on a clean tray until ready to cook.
3. Before placing the meat on the grill, add soaked wood chips. Place chips directly on white-gray ash briquettes or in the smoking box of your gas grill. If using a charcoal grill, you will need to add charcoal every hour to maintain the heat.
4. If using a pellet smoker, smoke at 220°F for 2 hours to get maximum smoke on the meat and then raise the temperature between 280°F-300°F to finish cooking and render the fat.



5. Place pork in the center of the cooking grate fat-side up. Cook slowly for about 4 hours at the higher temperature [280°F-325° F], or until an instant-read meat thermometer inserted into the middle of the pork registers 190°F-200°F.
6. The meat should be very tender and falling apart. If there is a bone in the meat, it should come out smooth and clean with no meat clinging to it. (This is the real test for doneness on the barbecue circuit.) Remember, there is no need to turn the meat during the entire cooking time.
7. If cooking a Bone-in Boston Butt, you know that it is done when the top layer of fat looks like cracklins and the bone separates and protrudes from the meat. Wiggle the bone and if it is loose enough to pull out, it's done!
8. Let meat rest for 20 minutes or until cool enough to handle. Using nitrile food-service gloves, pull meat from the skin, bones and fat. Set aside any crispy bits (fat) that has been completely rendered and looks almost burned. Working quickly, shred the chunks of meat with two forks by crossing the forks and "pulling" the meat into small pieces from the roast.
9. Chop the reserved crispy bits and mix into the pulled pork. While the meat is still warm, mix with enough BBQ Sauce (recipe follow) to moisten and season the meat, about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup. The recipe can be made in advance up to this point and refrigerated.
10. To reheat: place pork in a pan covered tightly with aluminum foil with about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup additional sauce in a 250°F oven, stirring occasionally. It will take about 40-60 minutes to re-heat depending on the quantity of pork. Stir well and re-season with a little more sauce when hot.
11. Serve sandwich style on a white hamburger bun and top North Carolina versions with Carolina Coleslaw (recipe follows). Serve additional sauce on the side, if desired.

Lexington-Style BBQ Sauce:

This sauce is a sweetened-up version of the Eastern North Carolina Sauce. It is traditionally used to dress pulled pork from Lexington, NC, west to the Mountains.

You will need to double this recipe to make enough sauce for the pork and the slaw.

- 2 cups Heinz apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon ground white pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 tablespoon red pepper flakes (the more flakes, the hotter the sauce*)
- 2 tablespoons white sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon coarse-ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (generous) Heinz ketchup



1. Mix all ingredients together and let sit at least 10 minutes or almost indefinitely in the refrigerator.

(*Note, the longer the sauce sits, the hotter it gets since the heat from the red pepper flakes is brought out by the vinegar. Start with ½ tablespoon red pepper flakes and then add more to taste.)

Carolina Coleslaw:

- 1 recipe Lexington-Style BBQ Sauce
 - 1 small green cabbage, chopped fine
1. Mix together and refrigerate for at least 2 hours to allow flavors to meld and cabbage to macerate. Serve with barbecue.
 2. To make an authentic sandwich, place warm barbecue on a classic hamburger bun—no sesame seeds—and top with a generous spoonful of the cold Carolina Slaw.