

The Smoking Basics eCourse: By Jeff Phillips

Chapter One

Selecting the Meat Properly

Welcome to my Smoking Basics eCourse where I will be teaching you what you need to know about smoking meat and cooking outdoors successfully. This first chapter will deal with one of the most important aspects of smoking.. *selecting your meat*.

Meat Selection

Like anything else, there are different types and grades of meat and while you may be tempted to purchase that half price brisket or pork shoulder it is best to make sure it passes the test before deciding to take it home:

- Make your meat selections last when you are in the supermarket to ensure that it stays cold until you get home
- Select cuts of beef that are bright red for best flavor with no splotches of gray or brown
- Make sure the packages are tightly wrapped with no tears or punctures in the package
- Meat should be firm to the touch.. not soft and cushy
- Meat should not have an unpleasant odor

You also need to know that meat is graded according to quality as USDA Prime, USDA Choice and USDA Select respectively.

The prime grade is only sold to restaurants.. the most widely sold grade to consumers is USDA Choice however with consumers being more health conscience, USDA Select is a widely sold grade as well.

I want to mention a few of the most popular smoking meats as well such as brisket and ribs since that is the ones you will most likely need to know best.

Brisket

Briskets are pretty straight forward but there are a few things that I want to share to help you insure that it turns out the best that it possibly can. To start with, briskets can be purchased as an untrimmed packer cut or as a flat. Your best bet when smoking a brisket is to buy the packer cut which should have plenty of fat on top and is the flat and point together unmodified by the butcher.

You should also try to purchase a brisket that is at or below ten pounds. I have used

briskets larger than this and had them turn out good but I have found that the best bet for flavor and tenderness is one in the lower range.

To end up with the most tender brisket you need to try to start out with the most tender brisket.. this is relative since briskets are NEVER tender when you buy them but if you will lay the briskets flat across the side of your hand so that it can bend on both sides, you will notice that some of them have more bend than others. The one with the most bend is your best bet for ending up with a tender piece of meat.

This is not fool proof but it is about the only indicator you will have so it is better than nothing. If your store is one of those that places it on a Styrofoam plate then this will not be possible.

Go for a brisket that has at least a 1/4 inch fat cap for best results.

Pork Shoulder

The pork shoulder is usually separated at the store into two halves. The best half in my opinion is the butt, sometimes called the "Boston butt". The other half is the picnic and is somewhat inferior in tenderness and flavor to the butt in my opinion.

It is very difficult to go wrong with the Boston butt.. they almost always have lots of fat marbling throughout the meat and will weight between six and nine pounds in most cases.

The picnic cut has a thick skin on one side which needs to be removed. Like the butt, it has lots of marbling and will work fine for pulled pork if you cannot find a butt.

Pork Ribs

When we say pork ribs we are referring to either spare ribs or baby back ribs. The spares are the meatier ones which come from down around the front of the rib cage. This cut is my favorite as far as flavor goes and are quite a bit larger than baby backs and tend to have more fat as well. The spares in my neck of the woods usually weigh in at around five pounds and are best when there is lots of marbling of fat between the bones.

The baby backs are a favorite of many due to the lower fat content and slightly shorter cook time. This cut originates closer to the back bone and is less meaty than the spares and have considerably less fat. This is not a bad thing but as with most things smoked, fat is a wonderful thing during the cooking process for keeping the meat moist. Look for baby backs with marbling of fat in the meat between the bones for best results.

Both spares and baby backs will have a thick membrane or skin on the bone side which should be removed prior to smoking them.

I will mention pork country style ribs as well just because everyone calls them "ribs" however, they are actually not ribs at all but are cut from the loin and may or may not contain a bone.

Chicken

Chicken is a great cut for a beginner simply because it can actually handle a wider range of temperatures and if you mess one up, you are out much less money than you would be with most other cuts of meat. I like to use chickens that are around three to four pounds but I have noticed here lately that it is not uncommon to see chickens weighing in at five pounds or more. The smaller ones tend to be best for flavor and tenderness but the larger ones will work fine if that is all that is available.

Look for chickens that are labeled "MINIMALLY PROCESSED" if possible but if not, find the ones that have the least amount of solution added during processing. If you can afford it, go for the organic variety as these do tend to be more tasty in my opinion.

Turkey

Gobblers, as I call them sometimes, are pretty straightforward and sometimes you don't have a lot to pick from. You also cannot see the birds as they are generally wrapped in a white plastic wrapper. They are also almost always injected with solutions of salt, water and other tenderizing ingredients which is frustrating at times for those of us who would like to be able to purchase a natural bird.

Look for the label "MINIMALLY PROCESSED" and if you find one but it. Otherwise, look for ones with the least amount of solution added during processing.

I try to purchase turkeys that have never been frozen if possible but unless it is within a few days of Thanksgiving or Christmas, it is not likely that you will find such a gift.

Purchase birds that are twelve pounds or less for safest cooking practices. Birds larger than this will stay in the danger zone of 40° and 140° for longer than what is considered safe and may put you and your family at risk of food borne illness. If you need more meat, then consider purchasing two smaller birds instead of one large one.

Final Words

That pretty much wraps up this segment on the basics of meat selection. We will continue in the next chapter with how to build and maintain the fire in your smoker whether you are using charcoal or wood or both.

Thanks for reading!

Jeff

Chapter Two

Heat, Fire building and Smokeology

One of the most important aspects of smoking meat is in maintaining the heat at a low range for multiple hours at a time. This can be challenging for the seasoned expert and just downright frustrating for the beginner. In this chapter, I am going to try and give you some tips that will help you with maintaining a fire that is perfect for cooking the meat very slowly. We will also go over some basic smokeology.

Building and Maintaining the Fire

A large portion of this chapter is geared toward those who use wood and/or charcoal for fuel and will not apply to the electric or propane smokers.

Unless you have a large smoker such as a Lang or similar horizontal offset smoker, you will probably not be using wood as a fuel source. It is more likely that you would use charcoal for heat and add wood sticks, chunks or chips for smoke flavoring.

The Way Boy Scouts Do It

In the event that you do have a really large stick burner then you will want to build a fire using the boy scout method which starts by building a small loose pile of kindling, paper, twigs and even dry leaves making sure that air can easily flow through.

Build a pyramid of twigs and small sticks around and over the top of this small loose pile of kindling. Once the fire is started and begins to burn pretty well, start adding larger and larger sticks and logs until you have the size of fire that you want.

Modified Boy Scout Method

Lay two or three medium size sticks parallel with a few inches of space between them. Place another layer the same way on top of them but perpendicular. Two or three layers is probably enough to start with.

Place old newspaper *sprayed with vegetable oil (*optional) with some kindling down under/inside the stack and light it. Be sure to add small twigs and sticks to keep the fire burning until the larger pieces catch on.

Once the smoker is up to temperature, continue adding wood as needed to keep the fire going and the heat at the level that you want.

Upside Down Fire Building Method

I have been experimenting with a new fire building method known as the "upside down" method. In essence, it is completely backwards from the boy scout method in that three large splits or logs of about four inches in diameter are placed side by side, butted together on the floor of the firebox. Three more slightly smaller logs of about two to three inches in diameter are placed perpendicular on top of the larger ones and butted together.

Another layer of even smaller sticks are placed on top of the second layer perpendicular and butted together.. about one inch diameter sticks are perfect.

Lay a section of newspaper folded in half across the third layer of wood then pile kindling on top of the paper. Light the paper which in turn lights the kindling. The kindling burns and slowly starts the smaller sticks below it.

The fire will continue to burn and as the coals from the upper layers fall to the layers below, they will catch on fire as well. I am still experimenting with this method but I am liking what I am seeing so far.

I have written a page about this at <http://wyntk.us/build-a-fire-upside-down>

Using a Charcoal Chimney

My favorite way to start charcoal is in a charcoal chimney. I have one made by Weber which will hold at least six pounds of charcoal. It looks like a large metal cylinder with a handle. A closer look will reveal that the charcoal sits on a wire cage and there is room at the bottom of the chimney to stuff some newspaper. Once the chimney has been stuffed with paper on the bottom and charcoal on the top it should be placed on a hard surface such as sidewalk, dry dirt or a paver stone.

The paper is lit from the bottom side and as the paper burns it catches the coals on fire and within ten minutes or so, all of the coal will be bright orange and is ready to be poured into the firebox of your smoker.

If the paper does not want to stay lit, spray it with a little vegetable oil and it will work much better.

***Tip:** Alternatively, instead of using paper in the bottom, you can set the filled chimney on the side burner of your grill for a few minutes to light the charcoal. This works like a charm and is my usual way of doing it.*

Weed Burner Method

This is a real treat for some of you pyromaniacs out there.. get yourself a weed burner which is basically a special wand at the end of a three to four foot hose attached to a small propane tank. This unit was designed to kill weeds along fence lines and such but works really well at starting charcoal or even wood.

Place the charcoal or wood as you want it in the smoker and let this flame thrower light

it up in a matter of minutes.

Maintaining the Right Temperature

Building the fire is the first step but keeping the fire going to maintain a specific temperature is the second half of the equation and this is further complicated by the fact that every smoker is different. The metal thickness, size of the firebox and smoke chamber, location of the chimney, size and number of dampers, etc. all play a part in maintaining the temperature of your smoker.

Unfortunately a large bit of this must be learned by experience.

I recommend practicing to find out what works best for your smoker and don't leave your smoker alone for very long while you are learning what is required to keep it going. My smoker does great as long as I throw a stick in it about every thirty to forty-five minutes. I have other smokers that are a little more greedy and need to be fed more often.

Some smokers will require you to constantly adjust the damper settings while others just seem to know what they are supposed to do and just do it.

I recommend not getting too worked up over temperature fluctuations. Your ideal temperature for most hot smoking is around 225°F but when you are learning I would give yourself some slack and shoot for say 210° to 250°F.

I always say, "It's not fun unless it's fun" which just means if you are not having fun then it is work and that is not a good thing. Instead of getting frustrated over it, if you are halfway through a cook and the temperatures just start going haywire, no one will fault you for putting it in a 225°F oven. At that point, you will probably have some good smoke flavor and it can finish with just heat. You can try to do it full time in the smoker next time.

Tip: *When using charcoal, I recommend the 100% lump charcoal if possible. It burns hotter and cleaner than most briquettes. It is more expensive in most cases so that is a call you will have to make.*

Minion Method

This is a method of setting up charcoal so that it will continue to burn for many long hours unattended. In short, it is a pan full of unlit charcoal with a few lit coals placed on top of it. The the lit coals maintain the temperature of the smoker and slowly light the remaining charcoal in succession over the course of six or more hours allowing you to sleep or do other things while the smoker cooks your food at the correct temperatures.

Wood chips/chunks are dispersed throughout the charcoal to give off smoke as the charcoal burns.

This system seems to work best with specialized baskets that allow a precise amount of coals to be poured in with plenty of airflow through the sides and bottom of the basket. This type of basket can be used in different types of smokers but the size and amount

needed to maintain heat will need to be adjusted for your particular unit.

The baskets I have seen are usually made from something like expanded metal and can be eight to twenty-four inches square and twelve inches or so deep.

The Water Pan

Ever wonder what the water pan is really for? It serves a couple of purposes one of which is the source of much debate. The first purpose is to help control the temp inside the smoker.

Water boils at 212 degrees.. as the water gets hot it starts putting off lots of steam which mixes with the air in the smoker and naturally strives to regulate the ambient temperature in the smoker to its own temperature just as ice in a warm glass of tea affects its surroundings and brings the temperature of the liquid down to a much colder state like itself.

The second purpose is something that is argued about quite a bit.. some believe that the steam creates moister air and that serves to keep the meat more moist in the smoker. I have not seen strong evidence of this personally but I will let you decide that for yourself.

Some smokers like to put various liquids in the water pan such as apple juice, wine, seasonings, etc. which they believe influences the taste of the meat. There again.. I have no solid proof that it really works that way but you should try it for yourself and make your own decision.

How Often and How Long to Add Smoke

The whole purpose of cooking meat outdoors in a smoker is to add smoke flavor..otherwise you could just cook it in the oven and be done with it. For those of you using wood for heat, the smoke flavor is there by default but for those who are using charcoal smokers or even gas and electric, you will want to know not only how often to add wood but how long to add wood.

The general rule for me is to keep a light wood smoke flowing for at least half of the cook time. For ribs this would be about three hours, for chicken you are talking about two hours or so. If you are using a strong wood like hickory or mesquite then this will give you good smoke flavoring, If you are using a milder wood such as apple or pecan then you may want to continue to add smoke throughout the entire process.

Watch the smoke and once it begins to dissipate, you will want to throw in more wood chunks or chips to keep the smoke going. This can be anywhere between every twenty minutes to every hour depending on your smoker and what type of wood you are using. It also matter whether you just place the wood on the coals or if you place the wood in a smoking box and set the box on top of the coals or heat source.

Once again, these guidelines will get you started but practice will be your best teacher.

My favorite smoking wood these days is pecan.. it tends to give me such a wonderful flavor on almost everything that I cook. I also love mesquite and oak which gives great

flavor to almost any type of meat.

What Kind of Wood to Use

I am not going to list every single type of wood that works well for smoking but as a general rule, anything that bears a nut or a fruit and is a hardwood can be used for smoking meat. There is one exception that I know of and that is with black walnut. There are many folks who feel it imparts too bitter of a taste and should not be used or should be used very sparingly.

You should never use woods that are from a coniferous plant, evergreens, pine, spruce, cedar, etc.

I know what you're thinking.. many folks grill food on a cedar plank and yes that is true but in my opinion placing a soaked cedar plank on a grill is just not going to produce the same type of reaction as actually burning the cedar.

From my research it is not recommended to burn cedar for smoking meat and I personally choose to not use it.

I received an email from someone a while back who claims that he uses cedar all the time in his smoker. I am not the judge on this and obviously you can do what you want to do but just be careful as many of these types of woods can produce harmful fumes and chemicals when they are burned in the fire and it is likely that sickness could result from these practices.

Final Words

This wraps up the second chapter in this five chapter eCourse on smoking meat. I look forward to talking to you next about how to use marinades, sauces, injecting, dry rubs and basting to flavor the meat that you are smoking.

Jeff

Chapter Three

Improving the Flavor with Rubs, Sauces, Etc.

Smoking meat is a little more involved than just placing meat in a smoker and letting it go. The process and preparation of getting the meat ready is over half of the battle and will go a long ways toward determining the resulting flavor of the meat.

There are many ways to bump up the flavor of the meat and while much of this is personal taste, few people would eat smoked meat if nothing was added before hand such as marinades or dry rubs. Many people will not even eat smoked meat without barbecue sauce so knowing how to increase flavor is very important to your smoking meat education.

Let's cover these flavor enhancements one by one and talk about what each one does and how to do it correctly without over-doing it.

Marinades

When I say marinades, I am thinking of a flavorful liquid that meat sits in, usually overnight. The liquid would be of a high flavor profile and soaks into the meat as it sits there in the fridge. It may also have properties that help to tenderize the meat.

Many people just buy some type of marinade from the store while others will just mix together things from the fridge such as soy sauce, Worcestershire, orange juice, and even soft drinks such as Coca Cola.

I don't get into marinades as much as some folks but when I do, I usually prefer a simple bottle of zesty Italian dressing. It works well and is extremely easy.

All in all, you can use whatever you like and chances are, if it is a flavor that you like, you will probably like the way it tastes in the meat.

Brining

This is a process that has gained a lot more popularity over the last few years and is simply soaking meat in a salt/water solution for a number of hours to draw moisture into the meat.

There is quite a bit of argument as to what actually happens during the brining process and why it works the way it does but I am not so concerned with that as I am that it actually does work and it works very well.

The main type of meat that I brine is poultry. A Thanksgiving turkey placed in water, salt and sugar along with some other flavorings for ten to twelve hours will end up being the most juicy bird you have ever tasted. Even if it is slightly overcooked, it will still be moist and juicy.

Somehow, moisture is drawn into the fibers of the meat and trapped there. Anything else that is in the water will be drawn in with it which is why I like to add flavorings to

the water such as molasses, Worcestershire, Tabasco, wine and even a little Zatarain's crab boil occasionally for a really flavorful and juicy turkey.

To read more about brining and to see my very own recipe for brining, check out my page at <http://www.smoking-meat.com/brining-meat>

Injecting

Simply put, injecting is using a needle and syringe to inject flavored liquid down into the meat right before cooking it. It is a good way to add lots of flavor to the meat very quickly.

I see this a lot from people who enter competitions.. they don't have a lot of time to sit and brine things for hours on end or spend a lot of time letting things soak in marinades so they inject. It's fast and it's easy.

If you look in the sauce aisle at your supermarket you will find any number of bottle of injection liquids and any of them are probably pretty good. It would also be fairly easy to create your own from what you have in the fridge. Things like soy sauce, hot sauce, Worcestershire, juices, wines, etc. mixed together will work great.

If you mix something up, just keep playing with it, write down what you do so you can adjust it later, If it taste good to you it will probably taste good injected into the meat.

For instance, I like to mix wing sauce and butter together and inject that into chicken legs and/or thighs for some really souped up hot wings.

How to Inject

You will need an injector such as the ones made by Cajun Injector. Apply a little olive oil to the rubber parts on the plunger before attaching the needle to the plunger assembly. Pour the marinade into a clean container to prevent cross contamination and fill the injector by placing the injector needle into the marinade with the plunger pushed all the way in. Slowly pull the plunger out to allow the marinade to be drawn into the injector.

Each type of meat is different so you will have to use your own best judgment as to needle placement. I recommend 1-2 ounces per pound of meat. Place the injector into the meat at a 45 degree angle and slowly depress the plunger as you pull the injector out of the meat. Depending on the size of the meat you are injecting, evenly space the injections so that you have the correct amount evenly placed all over the meat.

Just to give an example, In a 12 pound turkey, I would place 4 ounces in each breast, 2 ounces in each leg, 2 ounces in each thigh.

Dry Rubs

I love dry rubs on meat.. this is my preferred way to add lots of flavor to every bite. Rubs are generally a combination of ground and powdered spices mixed together and rubbed onto the outside of meat either the night before or right before it goes onto the smoker.

The supermarket will have tons of rubs and you can find tons of them online but my problem with most of them is that they are too salty. I just don't think a rub should be based on salt.

If you have the time and the patience, you can invent your own just make sure to write everything down accurately. Every time you add something try it out and continue this process until it gets perfect. Be sure to get advice from other people.

I went through this process several years back and came up with a real prize winner. This is the same rub recipe that I sell along with my sauce recipe and I get many raving reviews on it.

Just a side note: if you are interested in acquiring this recipe along with my barbecue sauce recipe which is amazingly good, you can get it at <http://www.smoking-meat.com/order>.

You will find yourself using it time and time again and you can feel good that it supports this website immensely. which is a really great deal.

To apply my rub or any rub for that matter, I recommend a light coating of regular yellow mustard on the meat. The mustard acts as a sticking agent for the rub and once the meat is cooked you will find that the mustard flavor is no longer there but the rub remains.

You can also use olive oil, butter or other wetting agents to create a better surface so the rub will stick to the meat.

Barbecue Sauce

I usually prefer barbecue sauce to be served on the side and warm but some people like for it to be added to the meat.

Let me just make one thing clear. adding barbecue sauce to meat does not make it "barbecue". I stopped at a restaurant a while back, which will remain unnamed, after seeing a huge sign that said, "All You Can Eat, BBQ Tonight"

Temptation got the best of me and I stopped only to find that it was indeed all you can eat but that the only thing barbecue was the sauce. It was all cooked in the oven no doubt and had barbecue sauce dumped all over it but it was most certainly not barbecue.

Just thought I would mention that.

If you do like a little sauce on ribs or other meat while they are cooking then do so toward the end of the cooking process for best results. Barbecue sauce added to ribs about thirty minutes before they are finished cooking will have time to caramelize and get all good and delicious by the time they are served.

I like to mix a little honey with my barbecue sauce if I am using it as a glaze. The honey will add a nice sheen to the meat and make it even more beautiful than it already is.

As I mentioned above with dry rubs, you can make your own sauce, you can use a store-bought sauce or you can do yourself a favor and <http://www.smoking-meat.com/order> which also helps support this site and all of the services that we provide.

If you do decide to try your hand at making something up.. be sure to write down everything that you do in case you need to make some changes to it later.

Mopping

Meat has a tendency to dry out while sitting in the heat of the smoker for long hours. To help keep the meat from drying out it is good to apply a mop every hour or so which can be as simple as apple juice, melted butter, or even plain olive oil.

I recommend that you acquire a plastic spray bottle for your mops which will allow you to quickly raise the lid of your smoker, spray the meat and close the lid. Fast is a good thing for this process so as to not allow more heat than necessary to escape from the smoker.

Final Words

I highly recommend that you spend a little time learning the material we have covered today and start practicing some of these techniques when you cook.. they really will change the outcome of your food in a really good way.

I appreciate all of you who support the site by ordering my recipes and such.. you are what makes this site great and keeps it going month after month.

Keep smokin' Jeff

Phillips

Chapter Four

Smoking Equipment and Supplies

In this chapter we are going to talk about equipment.. things that you will need in order to get the most out of this experience. As with any hobby, there are expenses involved and with smoking meat your largest expense will be for the actual smoking unit. Then there are gadgets which will help you along the way with some of them being fairly necessary and others just nice to have.

Along the way, you will find that the cost of meat will most likely be offset by how often you now eat at home versus eating at a restaurant.

Smokers

Smokers come in all shapes and sizes and depending on how much you are able to spend, may be really easy to use or may require you to do a lot of babysitting.

As with most things, you usually get what you pay for. A lot of folks start out with something like a cheap upright Brinkmann water smoker and while these work just fine they will require you to work a whole lot as well to turn out a good product.

There are also other considerations such as how often you will be cooking, how many people you will be feeding and what type of fuel you would like to use.

You have lots of options..no doubt so give it some thought, do the research and then go shopping whether it's online at Amazon.com, at Craigslist, going to yard sales or Lowes & Home Depot, you will want to find yourself a good deal on a smoker.

You may already have a smoker and if so, you are a step ahead in the right direction.

Charcoal Smokers

This is my recommended type of smoker for folks just starting out. They are fairly inexpensive to buy and operate and will teach you the basics of smoking without causing you to go in debt while you are figuring out if this is something you want to do as a hobby.

I think the **Brinkmann Water smoker** also called the "**ECB**" for **EI Cheapo Brinkmann** is probably the most popular unit for new smokers. You can buy them new for around \$59 or so and may even be able to find a used one for next to nothing at a garage sale or on Craigslist.

I must warn you that this smoker will require a few mods in order to make it work like a smoker should.. these mods can be found on my website at <http://www.smoking-meat.com/modify-brinkmann-ecb-smoker>

Among charcoal smokers there is also the **horizontal offset style of smoker** which has a larger cooking area with a firebox that is slightly lower and to the side of the cooking

chamber.

This style of smoker is really nice and in some cases can also use small splits of wood for fuel as well as charcoal but like the "ECB" it is not a perfect setup and you will find that it is hotter on the firebox end and will require placing the meat on the cooler end away from the heat and/or doing some mods to remedy this.

A good starter unit of this type is the **Brinkmann Smoke n' Pit** and starts at around \$150 or so depending on which model you get.

Gas/Propane Smokers

If you are looking to smoke meat but don't want to spend a lot of time tending a fire then you may be a good candidate for a gas smoker. Gas smokers are usually fueled by propane or natural gas and in my opinion can do a really good job of smoking up some really tasty morsels of food.

Your gas smoker will either attach to a portable bottle or it may be able to attach to a main line so that you are always connected to your fuel source. Most gas smokers will have a clicker that will spark to light the burner once the gas is turned on.

There will be a box that holds chips or chunks right above the burner. There may also be a water pan above the burner to add some moisture to the air and creates a nice barrier between the heat and the food.

The trick is to make sure that your unit will easily hold a temperature of around 225° even in colder weather. If not then you may need a different burner and the manufacturer may be able to help you with this.

The most popular type of gas smoker has to be the ones made by Landmann called the **Great Outdoors Smoky Mountain** which comes in several different sizes but I highly recommend the larger one called the Big Block if you can find it.

A company by the name of Smoky Hollow also makes gas smokers but I have not used this brand.

Note: just a good piece of information, a small tank of propane will last about 30 hours.

Electric Smokers

Electric smokers are also a great way to smoke meat without having to spend a lot of time tending a fire. The heat comes from an electric element much like the one in your electric oven.

The most basic of electric smokers is simply a round bullet styled smoker with a heating element on the bottom, a water pan above the heating element. The grates are above the water pan. Smoke is introduced by placing chunks of wood around the element at the bottom of the smoker.

A good example of this type of smoker would be the **Brinkmann electric water smoker**. Most people refer to this smoker as the "Red One" due to its bright red color.

Another type of electric smoker is a cabinet styled electric smoker which usually has insulated walls, and in many cases will have a control module which allows you to set the temperature and in some cases a countdown timer.

An example of this type of smoker would be the **Masterbuilt smoker** or "**MES**" as it is called by its' owners.

This type of smoker will have an electric element in the bottom, a chip/pellet tray just above the element and a water pan that adds moisture to the environment and acts as a barrier between the element and the food.

The "MES" may also have a special chute on the side of the smoker that allows you to add chips or pellets without opening the door of the smoker.

The electric smokers I have mentioned thus far are great in the sense that you don't have to tend a fire but you do have to babysit the smoker by needing to add chips and/or pellets every 20-30 minutes.

There are electric smokers that have an automatic feeder which deliver wood in the form of pellets or biscuits. This is really nice in that you can truly set it and forget it even go to bed and let the smoker cook on its own knowing that the smoker is doing its job.

One such smoker is the Traeger which delivers pellets via an auger feeder. If you are interested in this type of smoker you should check it out at www.traegergrills.com or find a local Traeger dealer in your area to give you a demonstration of the unit.

The Bradley smoker is a unit which also has an automatic feeder but instead of pellets, uses special biscuits made of wood to provide smoke for hours on end while you sleep, work or just relax. To find out more about the Bradley smoker, go to <http://www.smoking-meat.com/bradley-digital-4-rack-smoker-instructions>

Wood Smokers

I want to touch on wood smokers but not go too much in depth. There are so many kinds of wood smoker that there is just no way to cover all of them or even recommend one. There are some similarities among most wood smokers in that most of them are of the horizontal offset type with a firebox at one end and a larger area that holds the meat.

A fire is built in the firebox using splits of wood and once the smoker reaches its' target temperature, meat is placed on the grate for cooking/smoking. There is also a chimney at one end of the smoker to allow the smoke to exit once it has kissed the meat.

My wood smoker is a Meadow Creek reverse flow smoker built with insulated firebox and nice pneumatic wheels so it can easily be pushed around the patio or lawn or even up onto a trailer if you need to take it somewhere.

As many wood smoker owners will tell you, there is a definite difference in taste that you get from a wood smoker that just cannot be matched by other types of smoker. As a wood smoker owner, I can attest that this is true.

If I am entertaining or I really want to impress with my cooking then the wood smoker is what I use. I have been using it long enough that I know exactly what to do to make it maintain the temperature that I like and to impart just the perfect amount of smokiness to the meat.

It is a true joy to use and I recommend that everyone have a wood fired smoker if it is within your budget to do so. You will enjoy it beyond words.

As I've already mentioned, my wood smoker is made by [Meadow Creek](#) and is known as a "reverse flow" which just means that the heat/smoke travels from the firebox and all the way underneath the smoker grates before being able to come up into the smoker on the opposite side from the firebox end.

Fire Starters

I covered several different types of fire starters, namely charcoal chimneys in chapter two and I won't reiterate those except to say that the Weber version of the charcoal chimney is the best one in my opinion. It is bigger and seems to be a little stouter than the others I have seen.

These can be purchased at Lowes, Home Depot, Walmart, [amazon.com](#), Ace Hardware and similar other stores online and offline.

Gloves & Aprons

I highly recommend some hand and body protection when you are cooking outdoors. I have some silicone gloves that I like to use when flipping meat or removing meat from the grate to bring it into the house. It sure saves my hands from getting burnt and that is worth its weight in gold.

Weber makes some gloves that go all the way up to the elbows and are extremely heat resistant which works well when dealing with fire and hot coals.

These gloves and many other types as well can be found at [amazon.com](#) or at stores such as Lowes, Home Depot or Ace Hardware.

Aprons are a great way to keep grease, food, hot sparks and other such particles from getting on your clothing. Some aprons also have pockets which are great for holding tools, spices, etc. handy until you need them.

There are many aprons to be found online at [amazon.com](#) with the ones made by Weber being my favorite.

Cooking Utensils

Out of all the tools that I have for cooking, my tongs are what I tend to use the most. I like a set of tongs that is tough enough to be able to lift a 10 pound brisket. They must be able to close all the way and be easy to clean.

I also recommend a good set of [knives](#), a heavy duty spatula, a set of extra long stainless steel skewers and a good brush for cleaning the grates on your smoker and/or grill.

Many of these items can be found as barbecue tool sets which may be the best way to order them if you are unsure what you need.

Wood Splits, Chunks and Chips

Where to find wood can be a bit of a challenge depending on where you live so I am going to give you a few tips that have worked for me. You may find yourself needing to get a little creative as well.

If you have a small smoker then finding chunks and chips of wood is not that difficult as they are sold at most places that sell smokers and grills. The type of wood may be quite limited so you may have to resort to just hickory and mesquite. If you are wanting more exotic woods, you may be able to find these online by doing a search in Google.com or by going to Amazon.com

If you are looking for splits then I suggest looking in the classifieds section of your local newspaper or even on craigslist.com for folks who sell wood by the load and some will even deliver and stack it for you if you are willing to pay for this service.

We have a local hearth and fireplace store that sells loads of wood but you have to pick it up at the store. The good thing is that you can find oak, pecan, apple and various other types of wood depending on what they happen to have in stock.

For those who want to get creative, if you have a chain saw you can run an ad in the paper that you are looking for downed trees of a certain variety and that you will remove and cleanup the area at no cost. This should land you some phone calls if you are not too picky about what you are looking for and with a few hours of work, you could be rolling down the road toward your home with a load of wood for the smoker and nothing out of your pocket other than a little fuel for the chain saw.

Regardless of where you get your wood, if it is larger cuts such as logs or splits, I recommend letting it sit in the dry for at least 4-6 months before using it to allow it to dry out. You may be able to tell how dry it is by the weight and/or by noticing any cracks in the ends of the wood.

Dry wood is considerably lighter in weight than green wood and will usually have spider-like cracks at the ends of the pieces starting in the center and going outwards. Just some signs of dryer wood.

If you can't tell, then dry it out a little before using it to prevent creosote formation in your smoker.

Thermometers

I know some folks who absolutely refuse to use a thermometer during cooking and this is fine if you are so inclined but I feel it is much safer and wiser to know the temperature of the meat rather than guess at it.

When smoking at low temperatures, a few degrees can mean the difference between perfect and "OK" and to me that really matters.

My recommended type of thermometers for smoking meat is the [instant read digital probe meat thermometers](#).

These are units which have a monitor attached to a probe. The probe stays in the meat during cooking and the monitor tells you the temperature of the meat. This allows you to know at all times at what stage the meat is and you will be able to better estimate when it is done and be able to remove it at the precise moment that it reaches the right temperature.

Nowadays you can find wired and wireless models alike depending on your budget. The wired models have a metal braided cord that runs from the probe to the monitor and easily sits in the door jamb of your smoker or can be run through a vent or other opening in the smoker.

The wireless models also have a braided metal wire that runs from the inside of the smoker at the probe to the outside but instead of attaching to the monitor, it attaches to a sending unit. The monitor can be taken with you into the house or shop or even sit on your bedside table while you sleep and will readout the temperature of the smoker and/or the meat via a wireless signal. Really nice!!

I personally own about six of these thermometers and have had great success with them for the most part. There are some things that you must know to keep your thermometers and probes working for a long time. Never let the probe touch metal objects.. this tends to short them out and they just stop working. You can purchase extra probes but why do that unless you have to?

To prevent the probes from touching metal, I leave them inserted in the meat at all times or if I am using the probe to show me the ambient temperature of the smoker, I stick the probe through a small potato and set the potato on the grate. This holds the probe up and away from the metal grate. You might even want to eat the potato when you are done.. smoky and delicious in my opinion.

These thermometers can be purchased almost anywhere that sells utensils and cooking supplies. I have seen them at Lowes, Home Depot, local hardware stores such as Ace, Wal-mart, and many other fine establishments.

To see them and even read some reviews on my favorite ones, go to <http://www.smoking-meat.com/mavericket732>

Racks and Holders

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the plethora of tools that have been created for holding meats and vegetables in the smoker or on the grill while they cook. Some of my favorites include the [racks for holding ribs](#) upright in the smoker. This allows you to double or even triple the amount of ribs that you can fit into the smoker.

There are also holders made especially for making [beer can chicken](#). The device holds a can of beer or other liquid and even has a pan attached for catching the juices in some cases.

Everyone who spends any time at the forum (www.smokingmeatforums.com) knows that we are big on ABT's which are basically jalapeño peppers stuffed with cream cheese, meat, and other fillings and then wrapped in bacon. There are now holders made especially for holding the peppers upright while they cook.

I have seen holders and racks for chicken wings, chicken legs, turkey drumsticks, etc. which are also nice tools to have on hand.

None of these items are things that you must have but they are things that are very nice to have and can make your cooking so much easier.

Final Words

This sums it up for the equipment section of this eCourse. Next we will talk about actually cooking the meats and how to tell when things are done.

Jeff

Chapter Five

The Actual Process & When is it Done?

Now that you know how to select the meat, how to build a good fire and control the temperature, how to use rubs, marinades and sauces to kick up the flavor and you have the equipment to cook it on, let's get down and dirty by talking about how to cook the meat and how to determine when it is done cooking.

Smoking Ribs

Ribs can be one of the most rewarding meats to cook and they just happen to be my all-time favorite meat so I am very excited to talk about them!

Most of these techniques can be used on baby backs as well as spare ribs. I will make any distinctions between the two where necessary.

Removing the Membrane

Lay the ribs bone side up on a cutting board or clean tabletop and you will notice that there is a white almost plastic-like membrane that covers the bone side of the ribs. I highly recommend removing this to allow the smoke to better penetrate into the meat. Many restaurants do not take the time to remove this and let me tell you that it is like eating a piece of candy with the paper still on it.. just ain't right I tell ya'!!

To remove this membrane, use a sharp object like a knife or spoon handle to lift up a little piece of the membrane. Once you have a little bit to grab, use a paper towel to hold it and begin to carefully pull it off. If it tears just stop and take another go at it. With a little practice you will be doing this with your eyes closed.

Some folks have written me and said that they use catfish skinning pliers to accomplish this feat.. I say, "whatever works for you, just do it".

Adding Rub to the Ribs

Add a thin layer of regular yellow mustard to the ribs on both sides then sprinkle on enough rub to cover the ribs with a light coating of rub. I like to put enough of [my own rub](#) so that I can no longer see the meat. My rub is not salt based so this is OK. If you are using a store-bought rub then it is most likely salt-based and you will need to go easy with it.

Cooking the Ribs

Place the ribs flat on the grate if possible and cook them at 225°-240°F for at least 6 hours or until they are tender. (baby backs will only require about 5 hours in most cases). Be sure to spray them with apple juice or olive oil every hour or so to keep the outside from drying out.

When Are They Done?

The ribs are done when they are tender enough and not until. Visually you should be able to see the meat pulling well back from the bone and if grab a couple of bones and

try to pull them away from each other, you will be able to get a sense of how tender they are. If you still aren't sure, do like I do and just take a big bite. If they need more time then give them more time.

3-2-1 Method

If you like ribs that are fall-off-the-bone tender then look into the 3-2-1 method of cooking ribs which in a nutshell is 3 hours on the grate, then 2 hours wrapped in foil with a splash of apple juice added, followed by 1 more hour unwrapped and placed directly on the grates. During this last hour you can add barbecue sauce if you are making wet ribs. Baby back follow the same process except it is more of a 2-2-1 method.

I have a complete write-up on this method at <http://wyntk.us/3-2-1-rib-method>

More Info on Smoking Ribs

Watch the [YouTube Videos](#) on Smoking Baby Backs and Spare Ribs

Smoking Pork Butt (Shoulder)

Pork Shoulder is usually separated into two pieces, the butt and the picnic. In my opinion the pork butt is the best half of this cut and that is what should be used for the best pulled pork.

The butt may also be labeled "Boston Butt".

Prepping the Pork Butt for Smoking

Rub a thin layer of yellow mustard all over the pork butt. Coat the butt with a heavy coating of [my own rub](#) making sure to get it into every nook and cranny of the meat. I recommend placing the pork butt in a disposable aluminum pan during the smoking process.

The pork butt will get plenty of smoke in the pan and the juices will be caught in the bottom. We will add those juices back into the pulled pork later.

Smoking the Pulled Pork

Smoke the pulled pork at around 240°F if possible for 1-1/2 hours per pound or until it reaches an internal temperature of 160°F. At this point, you may want to wrap it in foil to help hold in some of those tasty juices. You don't have to but it is a good option.

Note: you may reach a point when it seems that the pork is stuck at a certain temperature, usually around 150°-160°F and refuses to climb any higher. This happens with large cuts of meat during low and slow cooking and the best thing to do is just wait it out. This is called the "plateau" and is completely normal.

Continue to cook the pork butt until it reaches an internal temperature of 200°-205°F at which point you can remove it from the smoker and set it aside to rest for about 30 minutes.

Remember it is not done until it reaches this temperature, no matter how long it takes.

Pulling the Pork

Once the pork butt has rested, pour the juices in the pan into a separate container and place them in the fridge for fat separation.

Enjoy pulling the bone out of the meat.. trust me, it should slide right out at this point and that is just proof that you did a pretty good job of getting it tender.

Stir the meat around using a couple of forks and pull the meat into the size of chunks that you like. I also like to go through the meat pretty good and remove any chunks of fat that remain. At this point, the fat has done it's job in keeping the meat moist and in flavoring the meat and it can safely be discarded.

Once the juices have been in the fridge for an hour or so, they should begin to form a thick layer of fat at the top. This fat can be scooped off and thrown away leaving you with the extremely flavorful au jus.

Pour the au jus over the pulled pork and stir it up real good.. it is now ready to eat and I have a feeling it is really delicious.

More Info on Pork Butt

The [Best Mistake I ever Made](#) with Pulled Pork

Smoking Brisket

Brisket is one of those meats that scares folks and I'm not entirely certain why this is. I think there are lots of misconceptions and hopefully I can put an end to those.

Prep the Brisket

Briskets can be prepped in a number of different ways, my favorite way to prep brisket is to make crosshatch cuts across the fat layer just through the fat without cutting into the meat. This will allow the smoke to get to the top of the meat a little easier since the fat cap is so thick.

I also like to apply a thin layer of yellow mustard to the brisket all over and then apply a good hearty portion of my rib rub to it. Massage it in making sure to get it all down in the meat, the cuts we made through the fat and anywhere else you can possibly get it.

If you want to get fancy, you can make incisions with a sharp knife about 3-4 inches into the meat to create little pockets for garlic cloves. The cloves can then be pushed in as deep as possible with your fingers or the handle end of a wooden spoon.

Smoke the Brisket

Like pork shoulder, I like to place the brisket in a disposable aluminum pan during the smoking process. Not only does this catch those tasty juices but with the bottom of the brisket sitting in the juices, it tends to soak the juices up and keeps it more moist than if it is just sitting on the grate with dry heat all around it.

Yes, I know, this keeps it from creating as good of a bark but in my opinion the trade off is well worth it in most cases.

Smoke the brisket at around 240°F for best results.

You can place some foil over the top of the brisket at around 160° internal temperature if you like. I usually skip this step on brisket.

Note: *brisket also experience the plateau I wrote about in the note above for smoking pork butt.*

The brisket is done at around 190° F and should be about right for slicing or pulling. You can even go a little longer if you want it to be really tender.

Remove the brisket and set aside to allow it to rest before pulling or slicing.

Preparation for Serving

Pour the juices in the pan into a separate container and place them in the fridge for fat separation.

Once the brisket has rested for about 30 minutes it can be pulled into pieces, chopped, or sliced depending on how you want to serve it.

I recommend separating the point and the flat before slicing. You will notice a layer of fat that runs through the brisket lengthwise. Allow a sharp knife to follow this fat layer to separate the two pieces. Once it is apart, it should be sliced across the grain into pieces that are 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick.

Once the juices have been in the fridge for an hour or so, they should begin to form a thick layer of fat at the top. This fat can be scooped off and thrown away leaving you with the extremely flavorful au jus.

Pour the au jus over the brisket pieces or slices.. it is now ready to eat and I have a feeling it is really moist and delicious.

More Info on Brisket

- Read my [All Night Brisket Smoke](#) article
- The [Seared Brisket](#) Method
- More Really Good [Tips for Smoking Brisket](#)

Smoking Chicken

Chicken is quite easy to smoke. place a little rub up under the skin wherever possible and place the chicken on the grate breast side down.

Smoke it at 240°-275°F until it reaches 167°F in the thickest part of the thigh. This will take approximately 2-1/2 hours or so but just remember, it's NOT done until it reaches the proper temperature no matter how long it takes.

Rubbery Skin?

Chicken smoked at lower temperature tend to have skin that is just not very crisp.. to help crisp the skin you can remove the chicken from the smoker once it reaches about 140°F and finished on the hot grill or in the broiler of your oven.

Tip: Mayonnaise rubbed on the skin before smoking has been said to help crisp up the skin as well.

More Info on Chicken

How I Use to [Smoke Chicken](#).. and it still works

The [Better Way to Smoke Chicken](#) (see the chicken section)

Times and Temperatures Chart

Pork Butt (Sliced)	225°F	1.5 hours/pound	175 degrees
Pork Butt (Pulled)	225°F	1.5 hours/pound	195-205
Whole Chicken	250°F	3-4 hours	167 degrees
Chicken Thighs	250°F	1.5 hours	167 degrees
Chicken Quarters	250°F	3 hours	167 degrees
Whole Turkey 12#	240°F	6.5 hours	170 degrees
Turkey Leg	250°F	4 hours	165 degrees
Turkey Wings	225°F	2.5 hours	165 degrees
Boudin	230°F	2.5 hours	165 degrees
Breakfast Sausage	230°F	3 hours	160 degrees
Fatties	225°F	3 hours	165 degrees
Meat Loaf	250 -300°F	3 hours	160 degrees
Meatballs (2 inch)	225°F	1 hour	165 degrees
Spare Ribs	225-240°F	6 hours	172 degrees
Baby Back Ribs	225-240°F	5 hours	172 degrees
Smoked Corn	225°F	1.5 – 2 hours	N/A
Smoked Potatoes	225°F	2 – 2.5 Hours	N/A

Other Great Information

[Turkey](#)

[Meatloaf](#)

[Smoking Fatties](#) ..Not what you think;-) [Meatballs](#) for Spaghetti

All of our [YouTube Videos](#)

Smoking Meat [Newsletter Archive](#) ..153 Issues and Counting!

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If you have learned from this eCourse and appreciate this site and what we strive to do, consider supporting the site by ordering recipes and other products from us.

You can also support the site without spending a dime by using our special link everytime you order from Amazon.com.

Simply use the link <http://www.smoking-meat.com/amazon> to get to amazon.com and we get a small commission from anything that you purchase.

My recipes are also out of this world and I encourage you to take this opportunity to [order them](#) and see just how good they really are. You will thank me again and again for making these available, they are truly that good.

Here's a testimony from one of our many happy customers:

Your web site is awesome I use it frequently. I have played with different rubs from various places, but your Rub and sauce kick butt no since looking any more this is it!!!! --James

I challenge you to try the recipes and if they are not the best you have ever eaten then let me know and I will get the money right back to you. I have no interest in selling you something that you don't like.

Join the Smoking Meat Forum

Be sure to come see us at SmokingMeatForums.com where more than 48,000 members discuss every topic imaginable concerning the smoking of meat. This is the most logical next step for furthering your knowledge of smoking meat.

The Website Where it All Started

We have more than 300 pages of smoking meat tutorials at Smoking-Meat.com so be sure to do some reading over there to learn more about smoking meat. We are constantly updating and adding new information so keep checking back.

In Conclusion

Thank you for taking this eCourse! It shows that you have a keen interest in the art of smoking meat and I am very happy to be able to share what I know. Take advantage of all of our information and products and be sure to tell everyone you know about www.Smoking-Meat.com and the forum at www.SmokingMeatForums.com.

Feel free to send this eCourse to your friends and family if you feel that they would be interested in reading it or would find the information useful.