

## Carolina Pulled Pork

Must Have: Smoker and Hickory or Oak or a blend of hickory / oak

This recipe should be started 2 days ahead of time as you need 24 hours in the fridge (brining), 12-14 hours to cook and 2 hours of resting before it can be pulled. You can use bone-in or boneless. I prefer bone-in as I think it provides a bit more flavour but not everyone agrees on that and boneless will cook faster.

Shoulders:

- Rarely will the grocery store have the right cut or large enough. Definitely go to a butcher for the shoulders.
- 5-8 pound pork shoulder butt (also called pork butt). Ask for most of the fat (especially the top fat pad) to be trimmed off - not edible. If doing more than one get butcher to ensure weight of each is as close as possible. I wouldn't make larger than 8-9 pounds as it takes too long to cook.
- Also note that it doesn't have to stay in the smoker after about four hours (internal temperature 140F) since by then the pores of the meat have closed and the smoke can't penetrate anymore. This is true for any type of meat so after 140F you can raise the cooking temperature to cook faster. You can even move the meat to a regular oven at the same temperature and let it finish there if it would be easier.

For the Brine (per shoulder)

- 4 cups water
- 4 cups apple cider
- 1/2 cup kosher salt
- 1/2 cup dark brown sugar (called Old Fashioned sometimes)
- 3 heaping Tablespoons of the dry rub (see below)
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 bay leaves

1. Dry Rub (per shoulder) Mix all of the ingredients set aside together in a ziploc bag/jar.

- 1/2 Cup dark brown sugar (called Old Fashioned sometimes)
- 1 1/2 Tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 Tablespoon cumin
- 1 Tablespoon onion powder
- 1 heaping Tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 Tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 Tablespoon chili powder
- 1 Tablespoon black pepper
- 2 teaspoons cayenne powder
- 2 teaspoons dry mustard

## For the brine

1. In a large stock pot/container add the water, apple cider, salt, brown sugar, 3 tablespoons of the dry rub, pepper flakes and bay leaves then mix well.
2. Trim any excess fat from the around the pork and all of the fat pad on top of the shoulder itself as it is not edible (if butcher didn't do). Make sure to get into the "flap" (if not sure where it is ask your butcher) and remove fat there / anywhere else it seems to thick. Not all of it will "melt" away so trimming matters.
3. Rinse off the pork and add to the pot /bag making sure it is completely covered in the brine and add the lid or whatever will close your container.
4. Place in the fridge for 12 (minimum) to 24 hours (ideal).

## To cook (hickory and/or oak for smoker - these are the most common Carolina BBQ woods)

1. Heat your smoker to 225-230F. It is ok to go higher initially because when you put the pork in the temperature will drop at first. So I will pre-heat to 250F and then lower the temperature to 230F after the meat goes in.
2. Remove the pork from the brine and pat very dry with paper towels.
3. Remove 2 tablespoons of the dry rub to another ziploc and set aside for after it is cooked.
4. To get the spice to "stick" coat the meat in a layer of ordinary yellow mustard and then sprinkle on the spice. The mustard will melt off leaving no taste or colour but the spices will remain and adhere to the meat. Rub (means sprinkle on - not actually rub) the remaining seasoning all over the pork and in any cracks or flaps.
5. With the fat-pad side (what is left) facing up, place the pork in the smoker with a meat thermometer - if available - inserted into the thickest part of the meat and not touching the bone.
6. We will cook to temperature - not time. So times mentioned below are just rough estimates - rely on the temperature.
7. Cook until the internal temperature is 140F (about 3-4 hours). At this point the pores of the meat have closed and will not absorb any more smoke (this is true for all meats). I raise the temperature to 300F at this point.
8. Check the "bark" on the meat occasionally. It will start to become firm - like a crust. Once it is firm, use a spritzer to spray the bark and keep it moist. I use either apple juice or a 50/50 mix of water and apple cider.
9. When the meat hits about 170F internal temperature it will "stall". This means it seems to take forever for the internal temperature to get past 170F - rises very slowly. What is happening is that deep in the meat the internal fats are rendering (melting) and as they do they are cooling the meat around them so the temperature stalls. Eventually it will pass this stall but you can speed the process using what is called the "Texas Crutch". Take the meat out of the smoker, give it another generous spritz and wrap it in either butchers (pink) paper (preferred) or aluminum foil. Re-insert the meat probe and put it back into the smoker to continue cooking. Wrapping it will help it push through the stall faster and it helps retain moisture in the meat which will make it super-tender. If you use the "Texas Crutch" cook this way till the internal temperature reaches 195F then remove the shoulders from the wrapping and keep cooking...

10. Cook until **203-205F** degrees registers on the thickest part of the pork with a meat thermometer. At this point use your thermometer to probe into several spots on the meat - the probe should slide in and out with no resistance at all - like butter! The cooking is done!
11. Remove from smoker, wrap the shoulders either butchers pink paper or aluminum and put it into the bottom of a cooler - cover with thick towels and let rest for 2 hours to allow the juices to pull back into the meat. This is important to ensure the meat is as tender as can be. It also allows time for the meat to firm up.
12. Now the fun! Unwrap and pull out the bone - it should come out with no resistance at all. Wearing some hand protection or use forks to shred (pull) the meat. If there is any leftover unrendered fatty bits just remove and discard.
13. Add the remaining dry rub that you set aside earlier to taste and toss to coat.
14. If you are eating this now then take as much as needed and add the sauce (next page). The unused portion can be frozen (I vacuum freeze and it will last several months easily) but without sauce - make new sauce later when you eat the rest of the meat.
15. Time to eat!

The most common sauces in the Carolinas's are a "red" or "yellow/gold". Red is most of the North Carolina while eastern North Carolina will just use a vinegar base and Yellow Gold gold comes from South Carolina. Recipes for both all three versions are on the next page.

### "Yellow Gold" Mustard Base BBQ (South Carolina style)

Add all of the ingredients to a bowl and whisk to combine. Pour into a jar with a lid and refrigerate 1 day to 1 week prior to serving for ultimate flavor. You can also heat and simmer for a bit on the stove which will "speed" the flavours combining.

- 3/4 cup yellow mustard
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/4 cup apple cider vinegar
- 2 Tablespoons ketchup
- 1 Tablespoon brown sugar
- 2 Tablespoons melted (unsalted) butter
- 2 Teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- up to 1 teaspoon (or to taste) of any Louisiana style Hot Sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon pinch of nutmeg
- 1/8 teaspoon liquid smoke

### For the "Red" Vinegar Base BBQ (North Carolina and North East Carolina versions)

Mix all of the ingredients in a jar and place the lid on to rest in the fridge for at least 2 days before serving. You can also heat and simmer for a bit on the stove which will "speed" the flavours combining.

- 1 cup white vinegar
- 1/4 cup ketchup (omit for a North East version of the sauce)
- 1/4 cup apple cider
- 3 Tablespoons dark brown sugar (or old fashioned)
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 1/4 teaspoon (or to taste) of any Louisiana style Hot Sauce
- 1 1/4 teaspoons crushed red pepper
- 1 teaspoon black pepper