

SMOKED TO PERFECTION

Cooked slow and low, this brisket is well worth the wait.

By Margo True

BRISKET COOKED badly is like shoe leather. Done correctly, it's so succulent and yielding that you can cut it with a fork. "You have to leave on enough fat; brine it for flavor and moisture; and cook it slow and low," says chef Tanya Holland, who makes possibly the best brisket in the West at B-Side BBQ, her Oakland restaurant. And while it's perfect for backyard barbecues, it suits the Passover Seder table too. "I got interested in brisket because my husband, Phil, is Jewish," she explains. "The day we got it right at B-Side, it was pure satisfaction in our mouths." Now it's a top seller at B-Side, rivaling the chicken and waffles at Holland's other Oakland restaurant, Brown Sugar Kitchen. She showed us how to get to brisket heaven, and as an extra gift, invented what you might call Jewish barbecue sauce—made with tomatoes, but spiked with horseradish.

MASTER CLASS



Chef Tanya Holland smokes brisket over applewood and hickory chunks, then braises it. Left: the tender result.



Brisket basics



WHAT IT IS Taken from the lower chest section of a cow or steer, brisket is a single boneless oblong piece, typically weighing 10 to 13 pounds.

LEAN VS. FAT Brisket is lean on one end (called the "lean half" or "flat cut") and fatter, plumper, and juicier on the other (the "deckle" or "point cut"). B-Side serves both together, but Holland

always goes for the deckle: "I like my meat marbled. Don't give me that lean stuff." Most of what's packaged at grocery stores is the lean end, but you can order the deckle from a butcher. Or buy a whole brisket and cut it yourself (only one half of the brisket fits on a grill at a time). "Cut it on the diagonal where you see the division between fat and lean," Holland advises.

HOW TO PREP Some fat needs to be trimmed so it doesn't cause flare-ups on the grill. Holland trims to ¼ inch: "I don't like to take off more than that, because most of it will melt down. And fat is flavor." She trims in layers, poking the fat to gauge how deep to take the knife (see photo at left). "You can feel where it's hard—that's where the fat is thicker, and you can go deeper."



TRIM FAT



BRINE



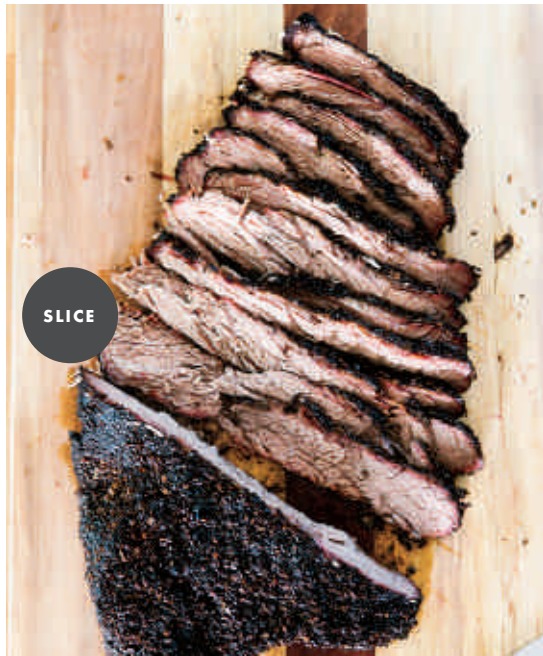
RUB



SMOKE



BRAISE



SLICE

B-SIDE BROWN SUGAR SMOKED BRISKET

SERVES 6 TO 8 / 8 HOURS, PLUS OVERNIGHT TO BRINE

Holland uses an industrial deck smoker at her restaurant, but an ordinary backyard grill, infused with smoke from wood chunks, works fine. A charcoal grill will give you the smokiest flavor; a gas grill's heat is easier to keep steady (for a gas method, see sunset.com/brisket). Throughout the grilling time, your goal should be to produce lots of smoke. "That's what gives it the depth of flavor," says Holland. And don't worry about the internal temperature of the meat: "You'll finish cooking it afterward, in the oven."

5 to 6 lbs. beef brisket in one piece, preferably the fatty end of a whole brisket (the "deckle" or "point cut")

6 fist-size hickory chunks and 6 fist-size applewood chunks*

BRINE

- 2/3 cup kosher salt
- 10 1/2 cups warm water
- 6 tbsp. firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 1/2 cup bourbon
- 1 1/2 tbsp. pickling spices (includes coriander seeds, cloves, peppercorns, and crushed bay leaves)

RUB

- 2 tbsp. white peppercorns
- 1/3 cup each coriander seeds, black peppercorns, and firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 1/2 tbsp. kosher salt



DIGITAL EXTRA

Get video lessons from Tanya Holland on prepping brisket. Blipp this page or go to sunset.com/brisketvideo.

1. Trim outer fat of brisket to about 1/4 in. If there's a thick pocket of fat in the meat, trim it out carefully, leaving about a 1/4-in. layer of fat.
2. Make brine: Whisk salt and water in a large bowl to dissolve, then whisk in remaining brine ingredients. **"The bourbon adds flavor and helps tenderize the meat,"** says Holland. Add brisket and put a plate on top to submerge it. Chill overnight and up to 24 hours.
3. Soak hickory and applewood chunks separately in warm water for at least 45 minutes. Meanwhile, remove brisket from brine and pat almost dry.
4. Make rub: In an electric coffee or spice grinder, pulse white peppercorns until coarsely ground; pour into a bowl. **"If you grind the spices right before you rub the meat, they'll taste a lot fresher."** Repeat with coriander, then black peppercorns (because each spice has a different degree of hardness, they are best ground separately for an even grind). Add both to bowl along with brown sugar and salt; mix to blend. Rub generously all over brisket, including in the pocket and on the sides. **"You have to really pack it on. If you have leftover rub, use it for pork chops."**



**PAIR IT WITH
Zinfandel**

Its jammy red fruit and pepper love the brown sugar, spice, and smoke on the beef.

Let meat come to room temperature, about 1 hour.

5. Meanwhile, set up a charcoal grill for indirect low heat (300°): Light 40 briquets in a chimney starter. Open grill's bottom vents fully. When coals are spotted with ash, about 20 minutes, set a drip pan (at least as large as brisket) on one side of firegrate. Bank coals on other side, piling them highest against wall of grill. Fill drip pan halfway with hot tap water (it helps regulate the heat). Put cooking rack in place with the hinged flap aligned over coals. Cover, with lid vents

fully open and over the drip pan. Let coals burn to 300°.

6. Drain 4 soaked wood chunks (2 hickory, 2 apple) and set on coals. **"The applewood is soft and fruity, and burns at a good rate. But hickory, that's the one you really taste. It's what people think about when they think about smoke."** When smoke begins to billow out of grill, position brisket on cooking rack over drip pan, fattiest side up. Cover with lid so that vents are over meat; close vents halfway.
7. Cook and smoke brisket 3 hours, adding 4 wood chunks to coals at the first hour mark, and again after the second, using 12 chunks total (you may not need all of them if enough wood remains to produce a consistently thick smoke). Turn brisket over halfway through smoking and add hot water to drip pan as needed to keep it about half full. Whenever heat dips below 275° (about every 40 minutes), add 5 or 6 fresh briquets to coals (it will take a few minutes for heat to climb). If the heat rises above 300°, nudge vents three-quarters closed (don't close completely or fire will go out).
8. Preheat oven to 375°. Transfer brisket to a roasting pan just big enough to hold it. Pour in hot water to come halfway up brisket; cover tightly with foil. Braise, covered, until so tender that a fork slips in easily, 2 1/2 to 3 hours.
9. Transfer brisket to a cutting board and let rest at least 20 minutes. Slice thinly against the grain and serve hot.

*Find at barbecue and home-supply stores.

MAKE AHEAD Through step 7, up to 2 days. Let brisket cool 20 minutes, then wrap in foil and chill. When braising, increase time to 3 1/2 hours. Also, save braising juices for reheating cooked brisket, covered, at 350°.



HORSERADISH CHILI SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS / 20 MINUTES

Holland developed this delicious sauce during our photo shoot. Its sweetness complements the smoke of the meat, while a punch of horseradish stands up to it.

- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups finely chopped red onion
- 3 tbsp. minced garlic
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. chili powder
- 2 cups canned whole plum tomatoes with juice
- 1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/2 tsp. pepper
- 1 1/2 to 2 tbsp. prepared horseradish
- 2 tsp. Tabasco

1. Heat oil in a heavy medium saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and cook, stirring often, until softened, about 10 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook 1 minute more.
2. Stir in vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, chili powder, and plum tomatoes and let simmer and thicken 5 minutes, breaking up tomatoes with a wooden spoon or spatula.
3. Remove from heat. Stir in salt, pepper, horseradish, and Tabasco, then blend until smooth with an immersion blender (or use a stand blender). Serve with smoked brisket. 🍴

PER SERVING 725 Cal., 73% (529 Cal.) from fat; 38 g protein; 59 g fat (23 g sat.); 8.2 g carbo (1.5 g fiber); 1,185 mg sodium; 156 mg chol.

PER 2 TBSP 23 Cal., 43% (10 Cal.) from fat; 0.4 g protein; 1.2 g fat (0.2 g sat.); 2.9 g carbo (0.5 g fiber); 160 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.