

Choosing comes to
cooking, having a
bone-in



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CHOOSING YOUR MEAT One of the questions I get asked the most is, "What cut of meat should I use for pulled pork?" Most of us are probably familiar with chops or pork loin, but neither of those seem suitable for a delicious BBQ feast. So what cut works best, and where can you get it? Typically, when making pulled pork, you'll want to use a pork shoulder. Fair warning - this is a big piece of meat. Pork shoulders can weigh as much as 18 lbs.

, and will comfortably feed over twenty people. If you're not feeding an army, however, you'll probably want to stick to a Boston Butt. This is the top cut of the shoulder, and can weigh anywhere from 5 to 10 lbs. It's a nicely marbled cut of meat, meaning it's extra flavorful. Usually you can buy it with or without a bone.

Though it won't make a huge difference when it comes to cooking, having a bone-in does add more flavor. This beauty will feed a crowd of 12 or more people. When making pulled pork, prepare to have a lot of tasty leftovers that can be utilized in countless amazing dishes (more on that later). Alternatively, you can get a Picnic Shoulder, which is the lower end of a pork shoulder. This has a larger bone than the Boston Butt, which you'll have to cut around when pulling your pork. It also has less fat marbling and more connective tissue than a Boston Butt, so cooking low and slow is absolutely essential.

Luckily for us, low and slow is the name of the game when making pulled pork! Finding these cuts in your run-of-the-mill supermarket can sometimes be tricky. But don't worry, this can be a blessing in disguise. Broadly speaking, supermarket meats will have less flavor than what you can buy in a

butcher shop, mostly because of the industrial way the meat is reared for grocery stores. An experienced butcher will also be able to help you choose the best cut and weight for your meal. So you'll get a better quality meat and some expert advice if you go to a local butcher. SMOKER, CROCKPOT, OR OVEN? So you've got your meat – now what? There's more than one way to make perfect pulled pork, so it's just a matter of finding the method that suits you and your equipment.

Chances are if you Google "How to make pulled pork", you'll find a lot of columns and articles by BBQ aficionados singing the praises of their smokers. Smokers are designed to maintain a low temperature (usually around 225 degrees F) while slow-cooking meat with the aid of smoke. There's a variety of different kinds of smokers, ranging from small backyard affairs to smokers big enough to cook a full hog. The benefits of using a smoker over other methods of cooking are pretty straight-forward: You get tender, slow-cooked meat infused with a delicious smoky flavor.

When cooking pork in your smoker, it's best to stick with hickory or maple wood chips. Though oak is a standard go-to for smoking meats, hickory and maple will add subtle complimentary flavors to your meat. Soak your wood chips in water overnight to stop them from burning up in the smoker, and add a fresh handful of chips every 30 minutes while cooking. Be sure to spritz your meat each time you add more chips to keep it moist and tender.

A quick spritz of apple juice will do the trick and bring out the sweet natural flavors of the meat. Before cooking your meat, let it sit for 30-45 minutes at room temperature. If you place it on the grill straight from the fridge, it will

be too cold and the outside will burn. Placed on the grill at roomtemperature, it should cook nicely and evenly.

Once your meat is ready, place it on your smoker with the layer of fat facing down. Allow to cook for about two hours before flipping over. Keeping your smoker's temperature between 225 - 250 F, allow 90 minutes cooking time per pound of meat.

So if you're cooking a 10 lb. Boston Butt, you're looking at 15 hours of cooking. Good things come to those who wait! Wrap the pork in foil for the final two hours, and keep it in the smoker. Cook until your meat thermometer reads 195 - this means the fat has been rendered, leaving nothing but melt-in-your-mouth, tender meat. Now, not all of us have access to a smoker or 15 hours to spend cooking.

But that doesn't mean you can't still enjoy some delicious pulled pork!

Crockpots and standard ovens can save a lot of time, and will still result in a beautiful bit of meat. When cooking with a Crockpot or other slow cooker, place your cut in the cooker with the rest of your ingredients (we'll get to those shortly). Set your cooker on low and leave to cook for 8 hours.

Alternatively, you can set it to high and cook for 4 hours. These times are based on a 5 lb. cut, as anything bigger isn't likely to fit in your slow-cooker.

The outcome will basically be the same - succulent meat that falls right off the bone! Cooking times in a standard oven are similarly speedy. Season your meat and roast it at 450 degrees F for an hour. After the first hour, reduce your heat to about 300 degrees and place your pork in a deep roasting dish or dutch oven. Pour in your vegetables, stock, and sauces

and cover with a lid or tightly-wrapped foil for another 3-4 hours. While slow-cooker and oven pork has to be smaller for practical purposes, you don't have to sacrifice intensely delicious flavor.

Even if you're not using a smoker, you can still get that trademark BBQ taste by adding a few drops of liquid smoke into your mix, or a couple of teaspoons of smoked paprika. Speaking of which, let's talk seasonings....