

'Cue up the Flavor

HOW ONE ALABAMA NATIVE IS BRINGING REAL DEAL SOUTHERN BBQ TO CHESTER COUNTY.

Alyssa Thayer

NORTHERNERS TEND TO TALK ABOUT BBQ LIKE IT'S just a single dish. But take a journey through the BBQ capitals of the South and Midwest and you'll realize it's anything but. From the thick, sweet sauce slathered on in Kansas City, to the bold "mop sauce" basted on in Texas, each place has its own unique flavors and time-honored methods.

"To me, BBQ means family, because we'd always get together to grill and barbecue," says Brian Howell, owner and chef behind Phoenixville's **Uncle B's Bar BQ**. Brian grew up in Florence, Alabama—the proud originators of Alabama White sauce. By the time he was 8, Brian's father had already begun teaching him how to stoke the smoker.

Time, temperature and wood are the keys to true 'cue. "Cooking hot dogs and hamburgers is not BBQ, that's grilling" Brian points out. Bona fide BBQ methods are low and slow, with temperatures hovering between 225° and 250° F. Timing depends on size and type of meat and ranges from a few hours for ribs to 20 hours for brisket.

After growing up in Alabama, Brian moved around quite a bit, landing in several BBQ hot spots that fueled his love for the food. In



Brian (center) with his family at the Feb. 2020 ribbon cutting ceremony for their new location.

2011 he moved to Phoenixville to be close to family. College game days were when they always gathered to enjoy BBQ and football. For these gatherings, Brian searched for authentic BBQ but couldn't find it. So they fired up their own smoker and never looked back.

By 2013 Brian had a roadside stand, which he named Uncle B's, an affectionate nickname given to him by his niece and nephews. Over the next several years he perfected his craft and hustled to find new locations. "We didn't have a lot of money to start, so we did what we had to do to build it to what it is now," Brian remembers.

In 2019 Uncle B's partnered with Root Down Brewing to take over a beautiful spot in downtown Phoenixville. "They do the beer, we do the food," says Brian. I asked if having assorted sauces and styles on the menu makes him a traitor to his Alabama roots. He laughs and says "I come from the camp of whatever people like, let them eat it."

Whether you make your own BBQ or treat yourself to down-home southern food from Uncle B's, make it a new tradition that brings you and yours around the table to share a meal and good company.



Brian's smoker in the snow, 2013.



In 2019 Uncle B's Bar BQ opened at 425 Bridge St. To the left is the back of the building and Root Down Biergarten.

The Rub

Make it and use it on just about everything. This recipe will give you enough for your first few BBQ attempts. Word to the wise: To avoid burning the brown sugar, use this rub for lower temperature preparations.



- 4 T. granulated garlic
- 4 T. granulated onion
- 4 T. coarse black pepper
- 4 T. kosher salt
- 8 T. paprika
- 4 T. thyme
- 2 T. cumin powder
- 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
- ¾ C. brown sugar, packed

Put all ingredients into a mixing bowl and whisk until well incorporated.

Makes 2½ cups of dry rub.

Crockpot Boston Butt

If you don't have access to a smoker, or you just need to set it and forget it ... this one's for you. Boston butt is deceiving in name because it's actually pork shoulder. This cut is flavorful and perfect for a crock pot preparation.



TipsoftheTrade

Some people use wood-burning smokers, others use a grill with a wood chip box, still others use the controlled heat of an oven or crockpot ... There's no wrong way to BBQ. According to Uncle B himself, "The key is to find out what you like and perfect it."

Here are a few of Brian's tips:

1. Lower the steaks: Start with something relatively inexpensive and forgiving, like pork butt, and work your way to brisket.
2. Spice well and early: Toss on the rub well before cooking to let the flavors sink in. This can even be done the night before.
3. Let it rest: 30 minutes is the minimum. This allows the juices to redistribute back into the meat rather than flowing out.
4. Batch it up: Don't be afraid to do a lot at once and then freeze it. Just use simple spicing so you can use the meat for a variety of different dishes—tacos, stir fry, casseroles. Yum!
5. Master the cut: Do your research to make sure you're slicing in the right direction for optimal tenderness. How you slice can make or break that brisket.
6. Fat Side Up: Uncle B likes smoking the meat with the fat on top. That way, it renders onto the meat for additional flavor and moisture.

As Brian says, "Jump right in, because the only bad BBQ is dry BBQ."

6–8 lb. pork butt, fat side scored

2 T. softened butter or olive oil

¾ C. "The Rub" (recipe above)

Coat pork butt completely with butter or oil to help the rub adhere to the meat. Generously coat the pork butt with the rub. Place it into the crock pot fat-side-up, on low for around 8 to 9 hours (until the bone pulls out freely).

Pull your crock pot from the heat source and let it sit covered for 30 minutes to allow some of the juices to redistribute.

Separate the meat from the liquid and reserve for later. By this point, the pork should be so tender that you can run a fork through it to pull it apart.

Note: Juices are flavor gold! You can use them to fortify a sauce, add flavor to another dish, or pour over leftover meat to rehydrate and reheat. Brian says it's a great addition to your collard greens, rice or cornbread, too!

Serves 6–8 depending on whether the meat is bone-in.

Oven/Grill and Baby Back Ribs

1 rack (2 to 3 lbs.) baby back ribs

3 T. softened butter or olive oil

⅓ C. "The Rub"

Preheat the oven to 275°. Remove the membrane (silver skin) from the back of the ribs by inserting a finger by the bottom bones of the ribs and pulling.

Coat ribs with butter or olive oil before covering generously with the rub.



Note: You can do this the night before, if you prefer, which will allow the flavors to start to seep in.

Place ribs in a baking pan and cover. Cook for an hour and half in a preheated oven before finishing.

If finishing on the grill, throw them directly on the grill (no pan needed) for 15 minutes at 375°. If keeping them in the oven, pull the foil off and turn up the oven to 425° for about 15 minutes.

If using sauce, you can add the sauce for the last 5 minutes of the cooking time to help form that delicious contrast of crisp outside and tender inside. Just make sure it doesn't burn!

Makes 2–3 entree servings.

Vegan Jackfruit 'Cue

This starchy tropical fruit is one of the hottest vegan trends on the scene. It's the perfect replacement for a pulled BBQ meat dish. Raw, jackfruit can be intimidating (30–50 lbs), with a sticky sap, but many retailers offer ready-to-cook pouches and cans. Brian uses Edward & Sons, which has no additives, but other brands can be found online and at local stores.

Note: Make sure you find unripened or green jackfruit. It's harvested before the starches turn to sugars, for a milder taste and better texture.



BBQStyles101:

Each major BBQ town has its own style, methods, sauces and, of course, traditions.

Kansas City is home to the most well-known sauce; a ketchup-based sauce sweetened with molasses and/or brown-sugar. KC is also creator of "burnt ends," made by recooking the point of a brisket to crispy perfection.

The Carolinas are generally known for their fiery vinegar sauce on pork. But Eastern North Carolina hangs its hat on "whole hog" roasting, while parts of South Carolina serve up "Carolina Gold," a mustard-based sauce.

Alabama focuses on chicken and pork. But depending on where you are, BBQ can be served with a thin vinegar-based sauce or a white sauce (up north). Alabama White Sauce is mayo and vinegar-based with mustard and horseradish (see recipe).

Memphis prepares pork ribs and shoulder "dry" (with a dry rub), or "wet" (covered during and after cooking with a thin, tangy, tomato-based sauce).

Texas is cattle country! Their specialties are brisket and sausage. It's also the place for "mop sauce," a deeply flavorful basting liquid and dipping sauce.

Kentucky is split. The West is known for mutton (mature lamb) paired with Worcestershire sauce, while the East emulates the Carolinas with pork shoulder and a vinegary sauce.

1 lb. green (unripened) jackfruit meat

1 tsp. refined oil

½ C. "The Rub" (see recipe)

½ C. KC sauce (see recipe)

¾ C. vegetable stock

Toss and coat jackfruit meat with the rub.

Heat a sauté pan on medium to high heat and add oil. When warm, place seasoned jackfruit into pan and cover with vegetable stock. Sauté covered for about 10 minutes, checking liquid throughout to make sure it doesn't dry out.

At this point, it should start to shred. But you can also use a potato masher or wooden spoon to break it up even more.

Turn down to low heat and add KC sauce to taste.

Serve heaped atop 4 sandwiches on a soft roll or bun.

Sauce It Up

Brian says he grew up mostly doing dry rub and sometimes adding sauce at the end. "If you do it properly, the sauce is the condiment not the main course," he says.

Kansas City, the "KC"

1 C. apple cider vinegar

½ C. "The Rub"

1 tsp. ground mustard

½ C. molasses

½ C. brown sugar

2 C. ketchup



Pour vinegar into a saucepan on medium-high heat. Bring to a boil and sprinkle in the rub. Reduce heat to medium and stir for 3 minutes. Add ground mustard, brown sugar and molasses. Stir for 1 minute. Add in ketchup and stir for another minute.

Take off heat and let cool.

Make it a Carolina Vinegar Sauce in a flash:

Whisk ½ cup of the "KC" with 1¾ cup of apple cider vinegar, until thoroughly incorporated.

Makes about 4 cups.

Alabama White Sauce

The pride of Northern Alabama, this lesser known BBQ sauce has it all: tangy, creamy, sweet and heat. It finds its place atop smoked chicken, pork and even grilled vegetables.

2 T. granulated sugar

⅓ C. apple cider vinegar

2 C. mayonnaise

1 tsp. salt

2 tsp. black pepper

2 tsp. lemon juice (about ¼ lemon)

2 T. horseradish

Whisk granulated sugar into cider vinegar and set aside.

In a mixing bowl, thoroughly combine remaining ingredients. Pour in vinegar and sugar and whisk until thoroughly incorporated. □

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.



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