

**TEMP TARGETS (USDA):** 165°F | Pork: 145°F + 3 min rest | Ground/Sausage: 160°F  
Brisket/Pulled Pork: 195-205°F (probe tender). Ribs: 195-203°F. Sauce: last 20 minutes only.

## ■ Shopping — 2 Days Before

- Primary BBQ meat — buy 2 days ahead for thaw time  
*Large cuts: 24 hrs refrigerator thaw per 5 lbs frozen*
- 3 BBQ sauce styles — classic, spicy, and sweet
- Dry rub — brown sugar, paprika, garlic, onion, salt, pepper
- Sides — baked beans, coleslaw, potato salad, corn
- Drinks — 2-3 per person for the event duration
- Plates, napkins — 4 napkins per person minimum  
*BBQ is significantly messier than burgers*
- Wood chips/chunks — hickory, apple, cherry, or mesquite  
*Hickory = beef/pork. Apple/cherry = poultry/ribs*
- Charcoal or propane — test igniter night before
- Heavy-duty foil for wrapping during stall

## ■ Day Before — Seasoning

- Apply dry rub the night before — 12-24 hr dry brine  
*12-24 hr rub creates better bark and deeper flavor*
- Remove rib membrane — pull from bone side with paper towel  
*Membrane prevents rub penetration and stays chewy*
- Soak wood chips 30-60 min in water if using  
*Wet chips smolder longer; dry chips flare faster*
- Make homemade sauce — improves overnight
- Prepare overnight sides — potato salad, coleslaw
- Plan cook start time — build in 1-2 hour buffer  
*Brisket: 12-18 hrs. Pork shoulder: 8-14 hrs. Ribs: 4-6 hrs*
- Calibrate meat thermometer — ice water = 32°F

## ■ Grill & Smoker Setup

- Clean grates and smoker — remove ash and old grease
- Set up two-zone indirect fire — meat never over direct heat  
*Indirect cooking = smoke and convection do the work*
- Preheat to 225-250°F for low and slow BBQ  
*At 225-250°F, collagen converts to gelatin over time*
- Add water pan — humidity + temperature stability  
*Prevents bark from drying too quickly on long cooks*
- Add first batch of wood once temp is stable
- Set up drip pan under meat
- Set up wireless leave-in thermometer  
*Every lid opening = 15-20 min cooking progress lost*
- Prepare spritz bottle — apple juice or ACV
- Mark time meat goes on — set a check alarm

## ■ Cooking Process

- Remove meat 30-45 min before smoking (max 1 hr) [USDA]  
*USDA: do not leave raw meat at room temp beyond 1 hr*
- Place meat fat-side up on indirect zone
- Do not open lid for first 2 hours — let bark set
- Maintain 225-250°F — adjust vents or add coals
- Spritz every 45-60 min after first 2 hours  
*ACV spritz adds tang and helps develop bark color*
- Expect stall at 150-170°F — normal, do not raise temp  
*Stall = evaporative cooling matching heat input. Be patient.*
- Wrap in foil at stall to push through — Texas Crutch  
*Trade-off: faster cook vs slightly softer bark*
- Apply BBQ sauce last 20 minutes only  
*Sugar burns at sustained smoking temps — apply late*
- Rest large cuts 30-60 min (brisket up to 2 hrs)  
*Resting redistributes juices. Slice immediately = juice loss*
- Slice brisket AGAINST the grain  
*Against grain shortens fiber bundles = tenderness*

## ■ Food Safety [USDA]

- Poultry: 165°F minimum internal temp [USDA FSIS]  
*Thickest part of thigh, away from bone*
- Pork: 145°F + 3-minute rest minimum [USDA FSIS]  
*BBQ pork is cooked far beyond this — 195-205°F for texture*
- Ground meat / sausage: 160°F [USDA FSIS]  
*Bacteria mixed throughout ground meat — must reach 160°F*
- Use a thermometer — color is NOT reliable [USDA]  
*Meat can be safe yet still pink, or look done but unsafe*
- Two separate platters — raw and cooked NEVER mix  
*Cross-contamination is the #1 cookout illness cause*
- Cooked food: discard after 2 hours at room temp [USDA]  
*USDA danger zone: 40-140°F. Bacteria double every 20 min.*
- Above 90°F outdoors: 1-hour limit [USDA]  
*Serve in batches — keep rest warm in smoker or covered pan*
- Cold sides must stay at or below 40°F [USDA]  
*Ice beds under serving bowls. Replace melted ice promptly.*
- Keep hot BBQ above 140°F during serving  
*Warming pan or steam tray at 140°F+ for safe holding*
- Wash hands 20 sec with soap after handling raw meat  
*USDA: soap + warm water for 20 seconds, not just a wipe*

## ■ Fire Safety [NFPA]

- Position grill 10+ ft from house and deck [NFPA]  
*Grills cause ~10,600 home fires/year in the US (NFPA)*
- Never use charcoal grill indoors or in garage [CPSC]  
*CO is colorless and odorless — can be fatal within minutes*
- Check propane connections with soapy water  
*Bubbles = leak. Never use a lighter to check.*
- Have Class K extinguisher or sand nearby — not water  
*Water on grease fire spreads it. Use lid, sand, or Class K.*
- Never leave a lit grill unattended [NFPA]
- Charcoal ash: cool 48 hrs in metal container [NFPA]  
*Ash stays hot enough to ignite for 24-48 hrs*
- No lighter fluid on lit coals — use chimney starter  
*Fluid on lit coals causes sudden dangerous flare-ups*
- Close vents and lid fully to extinguish charcoal

## ■ Serving

- Arrange: plates → meat → sides → sauces last
- Serve BBQ on butcher paper or wooden board
- BBQ sauce in squeeze bottles — reduces mess
- Cold sides on ice beds — replace ice as needed
- Label every dish — include allergen info
- Trash station within 10 feet of serving area
- 4 napkins minimum per person
- Wet wipes or hand-washing station nearby

## ■ BBQ TIPS + CITATIONS

- USDA: Poultry 165°F · Pork 145°F + 3 min · Ground/sausage 160°F · Always use a thermometer.
- USDA: Danger zone is 40-140°F. Discard food after 2 hours (1 hr above 90°F). Cold sides stay at 40°F.
- NFPA: Minimum 10-ft clearance from structures. Grills cause ~10,600 home fires/year in the US.
- CPSC: Never use charcoal grills indoors or in garages. CO is colorless, odorless, and can be fatal.
- Apply dry rub the night before. Apply BBQ sauce only in the last 20 min. Slice brisket against the grain.

## More cookout calculators at spoonandsip.com

Hamburger Calculator • Ribs Calculator • Party Drink Calculator • Coleslaw Calculator