3 RECIPES
to Master Backyard Barbecue

Big Green Craig’s
Reverse Seared Steak

Plus instructions for pulled pork & baby back ribs.
Thanks for downloading this special recipe book containing Big Green Craig’s Reverse Sear Steak recipe and my process for cranking out amazing pulled pork and baby back ribs on the smoker.

I hope these tips are helpful for you. If you have any questions, you can reach me at lavern@storyque.com.

Sizzling regards,

Lavern Gingerich

*StoryQue, editor*

PS. Are you hungry for more recipes? Subscribe to StoryQue magazine for more recipes like this every month plus tips and recipes to help you master amazing barbecue.
Reverse Sear Cast Iron
Tomahawk Steak
Big Green Craig
The Steak

I’ve started with a 56-ounce, 3-inch thick USDA Prime grade Tomahawk Ribeye from Wassi’s Meat Market in Melbourne, FL. The marbling on this ribeye is amazing, and that means great flavor. This steak came in a vacuum-sealed bag and had been wet aged.

(Most steaks in the US are wet-aged by vacuum-sealing the steak in a bag with an aging solution for a couple of days, as opposed to dry-aging, which takes weeks or months and produces a higher-quality and more expensive result.)
There are two problems with this steak: first, I’d rather not consume the aging liquid, and second, a cut this thick will be flavorless in the middle. The solution to these two issues is a dry brine.

To brine literally means to immerse in a salt solution. For a dry brine, we do the same thing without the liquid. Simply sprinkle the steak with a light coating of kosher salt on both sides, toss it into a Ziploc bag, and refrigerate it overnight. (If you are short on time, you can shorten this to a minimum of 4–6 hours.)

When you open the Ziploc bag later, there will be liquid in the bag. This is not juice from the steak. What has happened is that the salt has dissolved into the steak, adding flavor all the way through it, while forcing out the remaining wet-aging solution from inside. Dry the steak with paper towels and prepare it for cooking.

**The Process**

The only way to cook this thick steak perfectly is to use the reverse-sear method. A traditional steak would be seared at a high heat, then roasted in an oven to finish. A reverse sear reverses this process—we will roast the steak, rest it for ten minutes, then finish it with a high-heat sear.

With this steak, I am aiming for medium rare, which is 130–135 degrees F. Since the internal temperature will rise about 5 degrees during the ten-minute rest and 10 degrees during the sear, we’ll plan to pull it from the roasting stage at about 15 degrees below the target temperature, or around 118 degrees F.
Set up your cooker for indirect cooking and preheat it to 250 degrees F. Rub the steak with some extra-virgin olive oil and season it to taste. (I chose Lane’s BBQ Brisket seasoning for this one.) Insert a wired thermometer into the center of the steak and put it on the smoker. (I’m using the Thermoworks Chef Alarm for this cook.)

While the steak is roasting, you should have enough time to put together a finishing butter. Take a room-temperature stick of butter and toss it into a mixing bowl. Add some finely minced chives, flat leaf parsley, garlic, and a pinch of salt, and use a fork to mix them thoroughly into the butter. Lay a sheet of plastic wrap on the counter, and spread the butter mixture onto the plastic wrap. Roll the plastic wrap and butter into a log and refrigerate it. (This herbed butter should last for several weeks, and it’s a great thing to have on hand.)
When the steak has reached an internal temperature of 118–120 degrees, remove it from the smoker. To prevent continued cooking, do not cover the steak. Remove the indirect diffuser from the smoker and open all the vents to push air through the cooker and increase the temperature for searing. Your target temperature is about 450 degrees F. Place a cast iron skillet directly on the grilling grate.

Once the cast iron skillet is hot, throw in two pats of butter, a drizzle of olive oil, and a sprig of rosemary and thyme. Once the butter has melted, sear your steak in the skillet. I seared this one for a minute and thirty seconds on each side. To cook the steak evenly, it’s critical to sear it for an equal time on each side. I use the Thermoworks TimeStick to keep track of the time down to the second.
Dubbed as an “Egghead”, Craig is a business professional, husband, and father with a passion for food. He puts every effort into making every dish taste and look as best as possible. He believes that food should always be the best it can be every single meal.

Remove the steak, top it with the finishing butter, wrap it in foil, and let it rest for ten minutes. This is the perfect amount of time to grill some asparagus or sauté some mushrooms to accompany the dinner.

Serve and enjoy!
HOW TO SMOKE

Baby Back Ribs

Lavern Gingerich
Smoked rib recipes are a dime a million. YouTube and Google are jam-packed with information on how to smoke ribs. Unfortunately, most of the recipes out there don’t make it easy to master the timing of a smoked rib, and a beginner would never guess the learning curve that’s involved in mastering amazing ribs.

No doubt about it, pork ribs can be tricky to master. If you’re not careful, one time your ribs might be the most amazing ribs you could dream of eating, but another time they will be over-smoked and dry, or undercooked, with the thickest parts still clinging hard to the bone. In this article, I reveal my tips for getting consistent results, along with step-by-step instructions and mouth-watering photos to get you on the right track and cooking some of the world’s best ribs this weekend!

**Three Elements of Amazing Barbecue**

There are three main parts to creating great barbecue: 1) environment—consistent heat and smoke; 2) ingredients—meat and flavor profile of the rub and sauce; and 3) timing.

For this recipe, I used my Meadow Creek SQ36 offset stick burner, but any smoker will work if you can control the environment. I’m going to focus mostly on the other two elements of a great rib—ingredients and timing.

While I can give you specific ingredients to use, I don’t think there is a magic time formula that works across the board. Instead of hard and fast rules such as the popular 3-2-1 timing, I’ve chosen to share some guiding principles that will help you quickly master amazing ribs.
Common Challenges

Rib racks are thin, which means they are easier to mess up than a pork butt or other big hunks of meat. Besides, some parts of the racks may be 25% thicker than others. In a perfect world, each rack would cook uniformly from one end to the other, and all the racks would finish at the same time, but it doesn’t always work that way.

If you stay aware of what’s happening to your meat, you can make adjustments as needed, such as leaving some ribs on longer or putting them in a different part of the smoker. Just be aware that if you treat them all the same, you might end up with some ribs on the table that are perfect and others that are still a bit bouncy—not dangerous to eat, but a real disappointment. Some of this can’t be fixed by reading an article; it’s part of the acquired skill of cooking amazing barbecue.

In this recipe, we will foil the ribs for part of the cook. There is a debate over wrapping ribs in foil, but I think it offers a couple of distinct advantages, especially for beginners. First, it’s easy to over-smoke the ribs and dry out the ends, especially on a charcoal or wood fired smoker. If you follow my suggestions in this article, this will not be an issue. Second, foiling speeds up the cooking and helps those thicker racks get done quicker—helpful for avoiding bouncy ribs. Skipping the wrap is fine, but be prepared for a rack to take an extra thirty minutes because it’s thicker or just plain stubborn. It never happens in the recipe, but it does happen in real life.
Step-by-Step Instructions

Without further ado, let’s get right into it!

1. Some of the baby backs I get have extra layers of meat and fat in certain places. If necessary, trim them up a bit to keep them a more consistent thickness and to remove any loose flaps of meat or fat.

2. Remove the membrane on the back of the ribs. I use a catfish skinner, but you can also use a butter knife to loosen it, then a paper towel to grip and pull it off. It probably won’t come off as easily as some people make it sound, but removing it makes for a better rib.

3. With a shaker, sprinkle the entire surface (including the edges) of the ribs with my homemade rib rub. (Recipe posted here.) One batch of the rub should be enough for three racks of baby backs. Let them sit a few minutes until the rub turns into a wet glaze.
4. Get your smoker running at 225–250 degrees F. I fire my Meadow Creek SQ36 Smoker with about eight pounds of charcoal briquettes and a chunk or two of wood. The firebox vents are open about an inch and a half, and the stack is about halfway open. On Meadow Creek’s larger smokers, you’d want to keep the stack open while cooking, but the SQ36 maintains a more consistent temperature with it only halfway open.

5. Put the ribs in the smoker meat side up. Leave them there until they turn dark from the smoke. It will probably take 3 to 3-1/2 hours, depending how much smoke your smoker makes.

The SQ36 holds up to 6 racks of baby back ribs on the main grate, but that’s pushing it. The second tier grate will hold another 6 racks in a pinch. If you do make it this full, you might have to trim the ends off depending on the size of the racks, and then rotate their position in the smoker as they’re cooking, because of the restricted air flow.
Ready for foil

Done in the foil
6. Individually wrap the ribs in aluminum foil. Add some brown sugar and barbecue sauce to the top side of the ribs before closing the foil.

7. Set the ribs back in the smoker until the meat is tender. (No smoke is required for this stage.) This will take about two hours, depending how long you smoked them before wrapping, how hot your smoker is, and how much meat the butcher left on the ribs. The racks might not get done at the same time; you’ll have to open the foil pouch and determine whether they are ready.

Warning: This is the trickiest part. Sometimes the bend test won’t work with baby back ribs because of how thick they are. One easy way to tell they are done is by pulling on a bone as shown above. Or poke a knife into the meat to see if it’s loose on the bone. Usually the meat pulls back on the bone when it’s done, leaving about 1/4” of the bone ends showing.
A lot of people feel pressured to cook competition-style, thinking that fall-off-the-bones ribs are a moral issue. But who are we cooking for anyhow? If you want your ribs to fall off the bone, that’s completely fine. Foiling will steam and tenderize the ribs, so just remove the foil once they are tender enough for you. I personally like to cook them in the foil until the meat can be easily peeled off the bone, but while it’s still tight enough to support its own weight when picked up.

8. Remove the ribs from the foil and put them back in the smoke for 20 minutes to let things tighten up. This would be a good time to slather more sauce on the ribs.

9. Remove the racks from the smoker and lay them on a cutting board bone side up. Slice them between the bones and serve.

10. Take a moment to admire your work, then dig in!

—Lavern Gingerich
How to Make Amazing Pulled Pork

Lavern Gingerich
I’ve compiled a recipe with simple instructions and mouth-watering photos to help you quickly master amazing pulled pork.

Pork butts are very forgiving, and so easy to cook, because of how fatty they are and the high meat to surface ratio. Even if you overdo the smoke, once you pull it and mix everything together, you probably won’t mind it. And you really can’t dry out a pork butt unless you try. Yet some people are still cooking bad pulled pork. Don’t be one of them!

I get my pork butts through special order at a local grocery store with really good meat sources. Your local grocery store will probably have a couple pork butts on display, but if you’re serious about this, go for the two pack 8-pounders,
sealed in Cryovac. Make friends with your local grocer or butcher or check out Costco or a wholesale food supplier in your area. It helps immensely to start with quality meat.

There is a lot of debate on whether to put the fat cap up or down, but here’s one thing you have to keep in mind. The fat may not all render out while cooking, which means you would have to peel it off after it’s done. I actually prefer to trim some of the fat cap off before I cook the butt so I can keep all the bark. The butt on the right above could have been trimmed more, but it turned out just fine because of how I cooked it. Whether you cook it up or down, is up to you. In my opinion, it’s irrelevant to amazing pulled pork.

For this cook, I seasoned both butts with Meadow Creek Brisket Rub. Just sprinkle it all over the surface of the meat.
After a few minutes, the seasoning will start blending with the moisture in the meat and start looking really nice..

I fired my Meadow Creek SQ36 Offset Smoker with 6–8 pounds of charcoal briquettes. I also added a chunk or two of apple wood. My target temperature
was 250–275 degrees F. You can cook them slower if you want to. It’s more common to do low and slow around 225 degrees, but I’m not sure that it’s worth the longer cook time on a pork butt.

You may be using a smoker that can’t go above 225 degrees, and that’s perfectly fine. Work within the limits of your smoker and what it’s designed to do.

A couple hours into the cook, it started pouring rain, so I had to move the smoker under a roof. Since I don’t have a covered porch right now, I parked it in the garage with the smokestack outside the overhead door and under the eaves.
In my early days, I would hardly wrap a pork butt for fear I’m breaking the laws of authentic barbecue. Smoking pork butts is a lot of fun and tending the fire is great, but a whole day of tending an offset smoker can get a little old. Once the butts have taken on a healthy dose of smoke, you might as well wrap them
in aluminum foil and dramatically shorten the cook time. A good time to wrap them is around 170 degrees internal temperature.

As easy as it is to run a Meadow Creek smoker, the temperature does still depend on how you fire it. After I moved the smoker out of the rain, I fired it with more charcoal and a chunk of wood. I adjusted the firebox vents to give it slightly more draft to compensate for the weather and walked away. When I came back about 30 minutes later, the temperature was up to 325 degrees at the built-in thermometer (grate level must have been even hotter). Yikes! I closed the vents and smokestack for a while to get it back down and went on with life. I could not tell any negative effects in the finished product.

Once the meat reaches an internal temperature of 200 degrees, it’s done cooking. Take it off the smoker and let it cool enough to pull it. If you have insulated gloves or bear paws, you can do it immediately. It’s time to make sandwiches!

These butts finished in 7–8 hours because I wrapped them in foil. (One of them was smaller and it finished before the other one.) I burned a few chunks of wood and close to 23 pounds of charcoal during this cook.

**Flavor Boost:** As awesome as freshly pulled pork is, I almost always ramp it up a notch by adding some barbecue sauce and seasoning after it’s pulled. Sweet Baby Rays or Meadow Creek Hickory Sauce would be a great choice. I wouldn’t add much; just enough to moisten and flavor it a little. Sprinkle a little Meadow Creek Brisket Rub over it and mix it all together. This is a great place to experiment with various flavors to discover what you like best.
Freezing Tip: Pulled pork freezes well. If you have some you can’t eat right away or keep in the fridge, just pack it into quart-sized zip-loc bags, then date and freeze it. This makes it easy to thaw the pork in small batches. You can thaw it in the fridge and heat it in a kettle of water (in the bag) on the stove or remove it from the bag and heat it in the microwave or oven. Be careful not to overheat it and it will taste great. Not quite like fresh, but still amazing as can be!

—Lavern Gingerich
Great magazine ★★★★★
“Excellent magazine. Gives you a number of great ideas without talking down to you. For novice or the pro.”
— Thomas Forkan

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StoryQue makes barbecue fun and easy by sharing creative recipes and tips for those who have a passion for backyard barbecue. StoryQue also helps beginners master amazing barbecue.