

## Cooking Guide

[Cookshack Recipes](#)

[Tried & True Recipes](#)

[Pellet Grill Recipes](#)

[Meat Cut Charts](#)

[Smokin' Okies 101's](#)

[Video Cooking Classroom](#)



[Store](#) > [Cooking Guide](#) > [Smokin' Okies 101's](#) >

## Pork Butt 101

by **Smokin' Okie**

*Disclaimer: This is a work in progress, I've inserted some photos and I'm developing the text, please bear with me.*

So, today's lesson: Pork butt, Pork Shoulder, Picnics ... etc.

### General Comments

There are a lot of questions about pork shoulders and butts, so I've developed this guide to help you with the basics. There are many sources, lots of information, but I'll try to put a little here for you to get started. It won't tell you everything! I've developed this guide to give you enough information to start smoking your own.

Develop your own techniques and lessons and **keep good notes**

For purposes of this 101, I purchased a pair of butts at Sam's Club (they use IBP [now Tyson] and I've had great success. This is NOT an endorsement for them)

**What are they?**



A pork shoulder (front part) can be divided into two parts:

- "Butt" end - so called because it is the butt end of the shoulder (it isn't the actual "butt" of the pig...just the shoulder)
- "Shank" end - so called because it has the shank bone in it. The back "shoulder" of a pig would be called a haunch or a ham.

You generally make "pulled pork" from a pork shoulder cut (either butt or shank). The butt portion is most popular because it has less bone and less connective "stuff" in it. The shank portion can make some tasty pulled pork as well, but it will have a slightly different texture, and more connective "stuff" in it, not to mention the big ol' shank bone (good for soup stock).

### Cook to Time or Cook to Temp?

The preferred method of cooking pork is indeed to use a Polder (or other remote probe thermometer) and cook to internal temperature rather than time. There is some controversy as to what temperature; I've seen mention of everything from 180°F to 205°F.

I shoot for an internal of 205°F (and I check several places before I'm sure - it's hard to get a good consistent read on pork lots of fat can throw the reading off). If it's a small pork butt, I might cook it only to 190°F. I go on my instincts more than my Polder.

My recommendation: plan for 1 1/4 hours per pound, but don't do this blindly. I start checking mine about 1/2 way through my estimate and keep an eye on it when I'm mopping it. I've seen everything from 1 hour per pound to up to 2 1/2 hours per pound ... yes really.

FYI, in my Model 150 (that's my big one guys) I've done up to 8 butts and it averages almost 1.5 hours per pound total. These each averaged about 12-14 pounds each.

### A Note About the Plateau

When cooking butts, the internal temperature can often stall while the connective tissues and fats break down; this occurs usually around 180°F. This can last 45 minutes or can last up to 2 hours ... it's just one of those things. Sometimes, when I hit it and it's been a while, I'll bump the cooker up to 250°F. Remember, *it's done when it's done*.

### To Foil or Not to Foil

I'm not a fan of foil, but it does a great job of keeping the moisture in. My complaint is that I want some of the "renowned Mr. Brown" bark with my butt, and you can't get that with foil - it's too "mushy". It's also hard to get some mop onto the meat. A good vinegar based mop does wonder for pulled pork. (See link to recipe at the bottom of this 101).

Now, what I have done is finish them off in foil to get them moist and then pop them on the grill for 10-15 to crisp up the outside.

#### **So, What Do You Do With a Butt after cooking?**

Eat it ... ahh Grasshopper, come along on this journey we call "pulled Pork". Being an Okie (go figure with my handle) in the Air Force I had the pleasure of traveling the world and the US, and I've always found time for learning how different regions love their Q.

I've learned about Pulled Pork from those in the South East, particularly the Carolina's. I won't go into a full blown discussion of the virtues of Lexington versions, East Carolina, and whether to use vinegar, mustard or a tomato sauce.

#### **My suggestions for Pulled Pork**

Once you've cooked it (remember cooking is a whole 'nother lesson about vinegar mops), let it sit for 10-15 min (you always let the meat you cook sit for a few minutes to let the juices settle).

You can then pull (you can pull with your fingers, you can pulled with forks, you can pull whatever you got, you just pull). Some actually like it sliced, but you have to cook it only to 180°F to do that.



Now, when you're pulling, look for "Mr. Brown and Mrs. White" in the pork, there will actually be two slightly different colors of meat, hence the names. Look for these and taste them, they WILL be different. Some swear by the Mr. Brown. If you didn't cook in foil (you didn't did you? Shame on you) then you'll also have some "bark" this is also something many pork pullers look for and eat. When done right it's not all dried and crusty, it just has a firmer texture and not quite dried out. So, now you have this huge mass of pulled pork.

The two traditional ways to eat pulled pork is either on white bread or cheap, small hamburger buns. And you know what, it's great that way. Now for the hard part. Some will eat this with cole slaw on the top - yup, on the sandwich (also call a "samich" in some parts). Depending on which side of the mountain in Carolina (Lexington) you'll either use a mustard based sauce, a tomato based sauce or a vinegar sauce.

So there you have it, the pulled pork tutorial (short version). Hope that helps, Grasshopper. Enjoy, this pulled pork stuff is not native to Oklahoma, but my friends swear by it now - and my Memphis Style Ribs (oops, another lesson).

Welcome to the Pork Pulling Club,

Smokin' Okie

[Smokin Okies Vinegar Mop for Pulled Pork](#)

[Smokin's Pulled Pork Baste & Serving Sauce](#)

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