



You can see the two muscles, flat and point, in this whole packer brisket at the legendary **Black's Barbecue** in Lockhart, TX, where they've been smoking brisket since 1932.

Barbecue Beef Brisket Texas Style

"Anytime you got nothing to do - and lots of time to do it - come on up."
-Mae West

By Meathead Goldwyn

Summary. Barbecue beef brisket is the national dish of the Republic of Texas. Here's the recipe for how to cook it the way the BBQ champions and BBQ restaurants cook it. **Recipe Type.** Entree. **Tags.** Beef, brisket, BBQ, barbecue, barbeque, grilling, smoking, cookout, party, dinner, smoker, grill.

Brisket is the national food of the Republic of Texas and a whole brisket is a great excuse for a party.

A whole barbecue beef brisket is a huge clod of cow that can come off the pit almost black, looking more like a meteorite than a meal. But it is not burnt, and beneath the crust is the most tender, juicy, smoky meat. If you cook it right. And that's a BIG IF.

Like a Clint Eastwood cowboy, brisket is unforgiving. Cook it right and it is tender, juicy, and flavorful. Cook it wrong and it is like a wrangler's leather chaps. To help you get it right, I have written this book-length article/recipe/technique so that you understand all the concepts. Don't let it scare you. Brisket mastery is possible, *even on a gas grill*.

Briskets are the pectoral muscles from the chest area of the steer between the forelegs. There are two per animal, and because cattle have no collarbones these boneless muscles get a lot of work, so there isn't much fat marbling within the muscle and there's a lot of springy connective tissue in and around the muscle fibers. That's why they are so tough. Much of the world's brisket is made into corned beef, pastrami, or pot roast, but it is also a fine cut for barbecue, and it is required in **Kansas City Barbecue Society** (KCBS) cooking contests (about 500 across the nation) along with **pork ribs**, **pulled or chopped pork**, and **chicken**.

Beware: Corned Beef is brisket that has been corned, which is to say it has been preserved with salt and flavorings. It is not suitable for this recipe! To make Texas brisket you need raw beef. Click here for a recipe for **making your own corned beef**, click here **for making corned beef hash**, click here for **corned beef and cabbage**, click here **for an amazing recipe for smoking corned beef to make pastrami**, and click here for making **Rockin' Reuben pastrami sandwiches**.

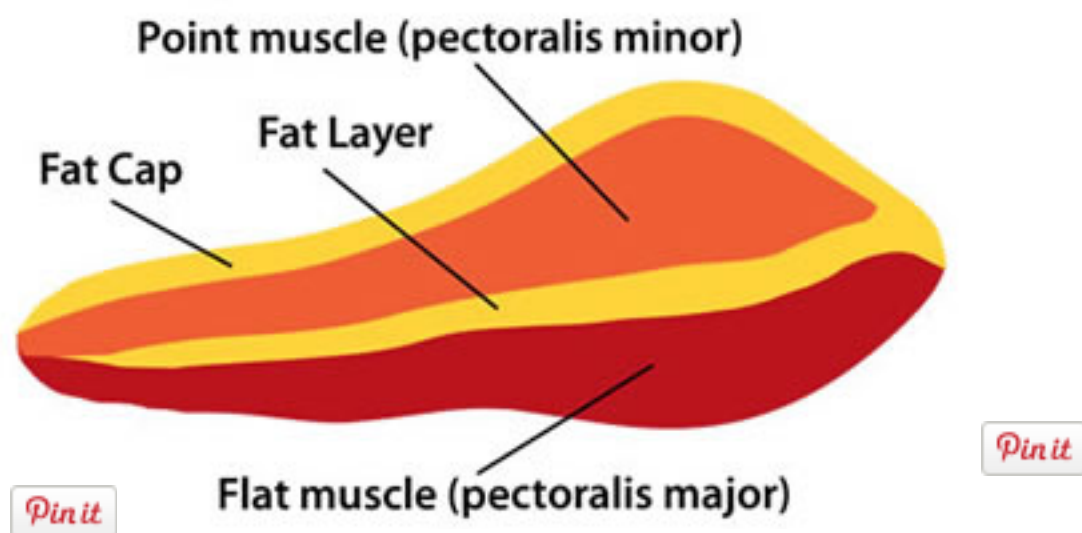
Your butcher probably offers three cuts of brisket, a whole "packer" brisket, a "flat" (sometimes called "first cut"), and a "point" (sometimes called "second cut" or the "deckle"). Each cut needs to be cooked differently.

The whole packer brisket

When you buy a whole "packer's cut" brisket, it weighs eight to 16 pounds and comes in an airtight Cryovac plastic wrap. There is a cap of fat on one side that can be up to 1" thick, and it is trimmed pretty close to fat free on the other side. The larger briskets usually come from older steers and tend to be tougher.

Most packers come in airtight plastic Cryovac bags and the label will usually show the "Packing Date". After a steer is slaughtered it is broken down and packed, usually within 24 hours, although if it was slaughtered late on Friday, it might not be packed til Monday. Competition cooks who do several briskets a week during the season tell me the best briskets are wet aged 30 to 45 days. Enzymes within muscles tenderize meat as it ages, so competitors often wet age their meat in cryovac in the fridge in their basement. Click here for **more about aging beef**.

Anatomy of a Whole Packer's Cut Brisket



There are two briskets per animal, and two distinct muscles in a whole packer brisket: A long flat rectangular lean muscle that sometimes comes to a point that is called the flat (*pectoralis profundus* or *pectoralis major*), and a narrower, thicker, fattier, oval shaped muscle called the point (*pectoralis superficialis* or *pectoralis minor*). Got it? The flat is pointy and the point is oval. Go figure.

The point has a thick layer of fat on top and there is another thick layer of fat that separates it from the flat. The flat makes nice uniform slices (think corned beef and pastrami), perfect for sandwiches or fanning out on a plate. Because one end is a lot thinner than the other, it often dries out as the thicker part of the clod cooks. For this reason, and also because the striation of the two muscles run in different directions, some cooks remove the point before or after cooking. It comes off easily along the fault line of fat that separates them. I often separate them and use the flat and the thick part of the point for sandwiches, and the thinner parts of the point for burnt ends, which I discuss below. Regardless, the thin end of the flat will almost always be a little lean and chewy.

The Hunk O' Flat (HOF) or Hunk O' Point (HOP)

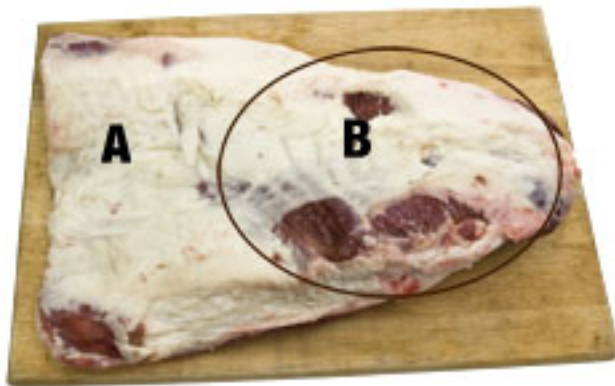
A whole packer brisket is a lot of meat! Many grocers cut up the whole brisket into smaller more manageable sizes. I often see cuts from the flat or point running anywhere from three to six pounds. I call them a HOF, for Hunk O' Flat, or HOP for Hunk 'O Point. HOF is sometimes labeled "brisket first cut" and HOP is sometimes labeled "brisket second cut".

HOFs seem to be more common than HOPs. If the meat case has both, chose the HOP. It has more marbling in the muscle and will be more tender, flavorful, and juicy. If you see only flats, ask the butcher if you can order points. HOFs are usually tough and it is hard to make them tender.

My grocer usually has a number of HOFs in the three to four pound range, perfect for serving a small family. If you are cooking a three to four pound HOF, there is much less waste and shrinkage, so buy 1/2 pound or more for each person. But don't ask your butcher for a HOF, that's just a term you and I use.

The HOF is practically pure muscle and has little marbling which is what makes meat tender and juicy. Most people who buy it are making pot roast by simmering it for hours in liquid. But you want the Texas taste, right? If you must do a HOF, then try really really hard to get Certified Angus, USDA Choice, USDA Prime, or even Wagyu beef. They have better marbling. Choose a thick HOF, look for marbling and uniform thickness so one edge won't dry out. If the meat is not on a plastic tray and you can flex it, select one that is floppy. The technique for cooking a small hunk is pretty much the same as cooking a packer.

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This is a whole 12-pound packer brisket untrimmed fat side up, as it arrived from the packer. The cutting board is 20" x 14 ". The fat cap is 1/4" to 1/2" thick. The flat is A and the point rests on top of the right side of the flat in the oval B. As you can see, the packer trimmed it quickly and left some meat bare. Not the end of the world.



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The same brisket fat side down. This side is usually close to fat free, although there may be some tough silverskin that must be removed. The flat is A and the point is B.

The grain runs in the direction of the whiteline. Notice the fat vein that runs between the flat and the point.



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This side view looks right at the end of the flat with the point rising in the background. Notice that the flat ranges from 1/4" thick on the right to about 1.5" on the left, and the point is more than 5" thick. Below is a finished example.



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Nothin' but controversy

As with anything barbecue, there is controversy surrounding brisket. Pitmasters disagree on several major scores:

Meat grade. Beef is graded based on the age of the animal and the amount of fat marbling. Click here for more about **beef grades**. The more marbling, the better because fat makes the meat more tender, flavorful, and juicy. The most common grades, from lowest to highest are: Select, choice, prime, and Wagyu.

I cannot stress this enough: When shopping for brisket, go for the highest grade you can find, and hand pick the slab with the most fat striation visible. If it is not labeled, chances are it is select. Avoid it. Brisket is the classic example of "garbage in garbage out". Please don't write to me and say you can't figure out why your brisket was tough if you did not buy USDA Choice or better.

A lot of restaurants and competitors prefer Certified Angus Beef (CAB) because the certification process requires meat to be choice grade or above.

Prime and Wagyu are even more marbled and will be more juicy, so if you can find it, and if you can afford it, go for it. A lot of the top competition teams are now using prime or Wagyu.

But grade alone will not make the meat tender. Brisket is just an ornery piece of meat and if you want it tender, you've got to work. Tasty is easy. Tender is not.

Wet aging. The top competitors buy only whole packers vacuum packed in Cryovac plastic. They find out the packing date, which is often on the label, and if it is not should be available if you ask. They let it age 30 days or more in the fridge at temps between 35 and 38°F because there are enzymes in the meat that help tenderize it. This is especially important for the flat muscle which is usually low in intramuscular fat. Do not try this unless it is in cryovac.

Trim. Some cooks like to leave the entire fat cap on the meat as insulation, trimming what remains before serving. This helps moderate the heat during cooking. Others trim most of it off before cooking, leaving a layer of 1/8" to 1/4", reasoning that spices and seasoning on the fat cap will never penetrate it and then it is wasted when you trim off the fat at the table. Some even remove much of the fat layer between the two muscles. I trim the cap to 1/4" or less. It helps seal in moisture.



Rub. Before it is cooked, many of the best Texas barbecue joints simply use "Dalmatian rub": Liberal amounts of **Morton's kosher salt** and coarsely cracked black pepper. For them, stylin' is to add some cayenne and garlic powder to the rub. Some leave it on the meat overnight in the fridge, but others just season the meat and toss it on the pit. Leaving it on overnight is a good technique because the salt

will start to penetrate. The other spices won't but you want that NaCl flavor amplifier down in there where it can also help the proteins retain moisture. On the competition circuit many cooks use a complex secret concoction of herbs and spices that give a little spark to the **bark**, the flavorful crust that forms after all that cooking. I use my **Big Bad Beef Rub**.

Slather. You can put a rub right on bare meat, or you can help it stick by moistening the meat with a little water, or you can put down a slather of mustard or ketchup, or you can use cooking oil. I usually use water.

My experience that they make little or no difference in the final outcome. Mustard is water, vinegar, and maybe white wine (all mostly water) with mustard powder mixed in. The amount of mustard powder is so small that by the time the water steams off and drips away, the mustard powder remaining is miniscule. If you want a mustard flavor, you will do much better by simply sprinkling it on the meat. I usually use water because the components of the rub **dissolve better in water than oil**. Far more important is what is in the rub than under the rub. So use whatever you want for a slather.

Pump. Many competition cooks like to inject brisket with an internal marinade by using large hypodermics and other gimcracks. These "pumps" add moisture, break down tough fibers, and add flavor. Many of the champs have been injecting the meat with a product called **Fab B Light** or **Butcher BBQ Brisket Marinade**, both moisturizers, tenderizers, and flavor enhancers. Fab B contains hydrolyzed soy protein, vegetable oil, sodium phosphates, monosodium glutamate, autolyzed yeast extract, xanthan gum, disodium inosinate, and guanylate. Butcher contains hydrolyzed vegetable protein (hydrolyzed soy and corn protein and salt, with partially hydrogenated vegetable oil [cottonseed, soybean] added), monosodium glutamate, sodium phosphate, and xanthan gum. Some traditionalists think this is way too Barry Bonds and are repulsed by the idea. The results speak for themselves. They are winning. A lot. If you choose to inject and don't want all the chemicals, don't use anything very flavorful, just plain beef broth. In most recipes I specify low sodium broth, but actually the saltier version is better in this case. It is like brining and the salt helps retain moisture as well as enhances flavor. Insert the needle parallel to the grain so it doesn't leave tracks in the finished meat.

Fat cap up or down, on or off? The argument is as old as Texas. I asked my beef consultant, Dr. Antonio Mata, a meat scientist and a former Consulting Technical Coordinator to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, if fat will melt and penetrate the muscle fibers. His reply was simple and unequivocal. "No way." I asked him to elaborate. "The fibers are packed too close for large fat molecules to squeeze in. Since about 75% of the muscle is made of water, and oil and water don't mix, it is just going to melt and run off." Click here **for more on the subject of fat caps**.

This melting is called rendering. We know that rendered fat can run over bare muscle, basting it, but little will go to the underside of the meat. Most of it will just

run down the sides and drip off. So the only basting is on the sides.

- We know that all the fat does not render during cooking.
- We know that rub applied to a thick fat cap will not contact the meat because the fat is a barrier. If the fat cap is very thin some might get through.
- We know that most spices and herbs in a rub are more soluble in fat than in water.
- We know that warm fat with spice rub is yummy.
- We know that the fat can inhibit moisture loss from evaporation and since **the stall** is caused by evaporation, a fat cap can slow the onset of the stall and help you speed through it.
- We know that bark will not form on fat because bark is mostly dried surface meat.
- We know that when cooking with heat directly below, as with a **Weber Smokey Mountain** or **Kamado**, the fat can absorb heat and protect meat from drying out.
- We know that diet conscious diners will trim thick layers of fat if the meat is served on a plate and not on a sandwich. That means the rub will be removed. They may leave a thin layer on.
- We know that when cooking two meats, one above the other, the fat can drip down and baste the meat below. We know that beans that sit below melting fat are magical.

So what's the right thing to do? I say, trim most of the fat but leave a thin layer, 1/8 to 1/4", that diners will not remove, that will absorb rub, and I put it between the heat and the meat, with beans underneath. Sometimes I even flip the meat midway through the cook just so nobody can win the argument.

Separate the two muscles. The point end is more heavily marbled than the flat and it can be twice as thick as the other end, so by the time it is properly cooked the thin end is dry. Some cooks remove the point layer by working a knife through the fat layer that runs between the flat and point. They cook both muscles side by side rather than one on top of the other. Since the flat is a pretty even thickness, it cooks more evenly with only a little bit on the ends overcooking. The overcooked parts can be chopped and mixed with sauce for chopped brisket sandwiches, fajitas, mixed with beans, etc. By cooking the flat separately you get beautiful symmetrical sandwich slices with a smoke ring all around.

The point has a thick end and a thin end, and some thick and thin spots in between. The thick end makes my favorite sandwiches because the point has so much more marbling. I use the rest for unctuous "burnt ends" (described below).

Separating the muscles doubles the surface area and creates more bark. It can also speed up cooking, knocking about 1/3 of the time off the time for cooking a whole packer. If you separate the muscles and remove most of the fat, on a 13 pound packer you can expect about 5 pounds of flat, 4 pounds of point, and four pounds of trim.

Cooking temp. Many competitors swear that low and slow, around 225°F for 18 to 20 hours for a whole packer, is necessary to make the meat tender and juicy. Legendary "Barbecue King", **Walter Jetton**, Lyndon Johnson's caterer, advocated cooking brisket at 275°F and up. **John Fullilove** of **Smitty's Market** confesses that he cranks the heat over 300°F and knocks out his briskets in as little as 8 hours. I have seen competitors take home big prize checks with brisket cooked at 350°F. The bottom line is that cooking temp seems to be less important than other factors. But because it is hard to make brisket tender, I advocate for low and slow until you have mastered the techniques and are certain that your meat source is superior. I cook at 225°F.

Mop. A lot of cooks like to keep their meat wet by mopping it with a baste. They say the mop replaces moisture that evaporates. Others say mops cool the meat and slow the cooking. The AmazingRibs.com science advisor, **Dr. Greg Blonder** has proven that wet meat holds more smoke, so mopping or spritzing with water, beef broth, or apple juice will yield a smokier brisket. Click here to **read my article on basting**.

Crutch. The **Texas Crutch** is a technique for speeding the cooking and moisturizing the meat. The concept is that you smoke for a few hours, and when the meat hits about 150°F, wrap it tightly in heavy-duty foil (never plastic wrap) with a little beef broth, apple juice, white wine, or light beer, and let it braise in the foil in the cooker. If you don't wrap, when the meat hits about 150°F moisture rises to the surface and cools the meat by evaporation, like sweat on an athlete. The meat then sits there stuck at 150 to 160°F for up to 5 hours. This stall is a maddening point in the process when the meat seems like it is stuck. The temp just doesn't rise for hours at a time. This is freaky and a lot of novices panic when it happens. Many people think the stall is caused by melting fat or collagen. It is not. Click here to learn more about **the stall**.

The down side of wrapping is that the foil softens the crusty bark. You can overcome that by placing the meat over high heat for about 10 minutes per side just before slicing. I think wrapping in foil and resting in a faux cambro is essential for tender juicy brisket.

You do not need to do this. If you don't you'll end up with a firmer crust, but you risk slightly drier and tougher meat. Brisket is the only meat I crutch. In competitions, all the teams crutch their brisket as well as pork shoulder and ribs.

Purists say it is not *traditional*. Spare me. Cooking with charcoal in a steel tube is not traditional either. You want tradition? Go dig a pit.

When is it done? Steaks from along the back of the animal are done at 130 to 135°F, at which they are most tender and juicy. But that muscle is more tender and juicy because it doesn't have to work hard. The brisket, the pectorals, get a lot more work and have a lot more tough connective tissue that needs to be softened, so you just can't take it off at the same temps as steaks. For more on this dichotomy, **read my article on meat science**.

Old time pitmasters say brisket is done when it is done. They say you really can't tell by temperature. Each brisket is different. They can tell when it is ready by feel. Some talk about a gelatinous bounce it has when they poke it because the connective tissues have melted. They call it the "wabba wabba" point. Others stick a fork in the side of the flat and twist. If it turns easily, it is ready. Yes, that's where the expression "stick a fork in it" came from. "Fast Eddy" Maurin says he waits until it is "as soft as buttah."

The rest of us have to rely on temperature, and despite their bravado, the top pitmasters on the competition circuit **all use digital thermometers to help them**. A lot will depend on the quality of the meat, how moist the air is in the cooker, if you injected, and how long you crutched. I've heard skilled cooks tell me every number from 195 to 205°F. A lot of top competitors swear by 203°F, and I have noticed that something magic does seem to happen at this number. At this temp, the thermometer probe glides in effortlessly, like buttah (once it gets through the bark). If it never gets tender, pull it off before it hits 205°F.

Holding. Then it comes off the cooker and it gets wrapped in foil and sits in a **faux cambro**, an insulated box, for 1 to 4 hours. You can also let it hold in foil in an oven, indoor or out, at 170 to 190°F. Holding helps tenderize by allowing some carryover cooking which helps melt tough connective tissue. The foil also captures natural *jus* for use in a sauce, and holding the meat allows the surface parts that have dried out during cooking to absorb some of the juices. This is not the same as resting a steak or other meats, **which I do not recommend**. Holding is also a great fudge factor that lets you take the meat off when it is ready and hold it until the guests are ready.

Slicing. When it is cooked, controversy reigns over slicing. Brisket is easier to chew if you cut it perpendicular to the grain. Cut with the grain and it can be stringy and chewy. The problem is that there are two muscles, the flat and the point, and the grains run in different directions. Most folks slice from the thicker, point end into about 1/8" to 1/4" thick slices. Some folks run a knife through the fat layer between the point and flat and separate them and slice each separately. Some folks cut off the flat where the point meets it and then they rotate it so the cut is on the side and they slice through the point and flat from the side. See the sidebar for photos of how **Barry Sorkin of Smoque BBQ in Chicago** slices his incredible succulent brisket. That's the way I do it.

Sauce. To some people, it's not barbecue unless it has a sweet red sauce on it. Not to Texans. "In Texas we celebrate great brisket by not messing with it," says Daniel Vaughn, the barbecue critic for **Texas Monthly**. "If it's done right then you slice it pencil thick and slap it on a piece of butcher paper. It's naked, quivering and vulnerable, so it has to stand on its own." In some places a thin decidedly not-sweet, tomato-y gravy-like **jus** is tolerated.

Recipe for Texas-style whole packer brisket

In the recipe below I have chosen a path that yields excellent results for me and my readers. Some may dispute my choices, but if you start here, you can then riff on the controversies above. If your effort yields meat that is a bit dry or tough, try again. Sometimes it's the steer, not the recipe or the cook! Cattle are not widgets. But remember, garbage in, garbage out. Start with choice grade beef or better.

Makes. 12 servings if you are cooking a whole packer of about 12 pounds. Calculate about 1 pound of meat or more per person. There will be significant loss, up to 20% from fat trimming and up to 40% from shrinkage. You'll end up with about half a pound per person, more than enough and maybe you'll have some leftovers.

Preparation time. 5 minutes to apply the salt. If you can let the salt soak in for an hour or two, that would be nice. 24 hours is better.

Cooking time. About 10 to 12 hours for a flat at 225°F if you wrap it tightly in foil at about 150°F, depending on your cooker, humidity and other variables. If you do not foil the meat it can take up to 12 to 14 hours. For whole packers, which are thicker, allow up to 14 hours if wrapped, up to 18 hours if nekkid. On an electric it can move a bit faster because it is so humid in there. Remember it is not the weight of a piece of meat that determines cooking time, it is thickness. **Read more about what determines cooking times.** Start early. If it gets done early, you can hold it in a faux cambro or in an oven at 170 to 200°F (see rest time, below). But the rules of thumb can vary significantly by as much as 25% depending on how thick it is at the thickest point, and the orneriness of the particular steer whose flesh you are honoring. There are too many variables to be precise. Once you have done the same cut on the same cooker several times, you'll be able to better predict.

Holding. When the meat is cooked, wrap it in foil, then wrap it in a towel, and stick it in a faux cambro (a plastic cooler), for 1 to 4 hours. I discuss this above.

Toolkit. This is a long cook so make sure you have plenty of fuel and wood. You'll also need about 6' of heavy-duty aluminum foil and a plastic beer cooler bigger than the brisket (not styrofoam, which could melt) with a towel or blanket. Don't forget a comfy chair, a book, tunes, and plenty of beer.

Ingredients for the meat

1/2 cup **Big Bad Beef Rub**

4 tablespoons kosher salt

1 whole packer brisket about 12 pounds, untrimmed, USDA **Choice grade or higher**

1/8 cup of **beef broth** per pound of raw meat for injecting

1/2 cup of beef broth for use in the Texas Crutch

Sauce optional. 2 cups of **Texas Barbecue Mop-Sauce** (you can make this days in advance) for a packer, or 1 cup for a HOF.

Sides

Brisket is great with **potatoes**. For sandwiches, use thick slices of sturdy bread or kaiser rolls, and let the gravy soak in and get sloppy. Garnish with grilled ancho and red bell peppers or **caramelized onions**.

Method

1) **Trim.** Rinse the meat and dry it with paper towels. If you have a packer, trim off most of the fat cap but leave about 1/4". If you are trimming a packer, until you get the hang of it you might cut off some of the meat while trimming. No harm, no foul. I remove the point. Some cooks attempt to remove some of the fat layer between the flat and the point by slicing them apart from both sides, but not slicing all the way through so they remain attached. If you are competing, trim the flat to about 9" wide in order to fit the width of the standard 9" x 9" turn-in box after shrinkage. On the meaty side, slice off any silverskin, a tough thin membrane. If you have a HOF, you probably will not need to trim much at all. Just make sure there is no silverskin on the meaty side. I freeze the fat, save it, and grind it if I think my **burgers** need more fat. I render some of it over low heat in a pan and freeze that too. I use it to **paint my steaks just before searing**.

2) **Pump.** I always inject briskets with **beef broth**. This meat takes so long to cook the extra moisture is needed to keep it from dehydrating, and the salt helps the meat hold on to moisture and enhances flavor. Use broth only. No need to add spices juices or other flavorings. All we want here is moisture. We don't want the fluid to mask the flavor of the meat. If you have a **hypodermic for injecting meat**, now's the time to use it. Pump in about 1 ounce of beef broth per pound of raw meat by inserting the needle parallel to the grain in several locations about 1" apart and back it out as you press the plunger. Do it in the sink and be careful so you don't get squirted in the eye.

3) **Rub.** Anywhere from 12 hours to 1 hour before cooking, if you can, salt the meat so it can work its way in. Notice the direction of the grain of the flat and remember this so you can carve it perpendicular to the grain. Some people even mark it with a slice in the surface. Coat the meat lightly with water and sprinkle the **Big Bad Beef Rub** liberally on all exposed meat and rub it in. I strongly recommend you use a digital **remote thermometer such as the Maverick**, and insert the probe with the tip centered in the thickest part of the meat.

4) **Preheat.** OK, before we begin, it is important to remember that brisket is an inexact science, and the timing can vary significantly depending on the size of your brisket, it's moisture and fat content, and the nature of your cooker, not to mention the accuracy of your thermometer. But the method I describe has a long period of resting in an insulated beer cooler, and that time is flexible so you can use that buffer time to keep dinner on schedule. Keep the meat chilled. Chilled meat attracts more smoke (read about this in **my article on smoke**). If you are using a grill, set it up for **indirect cooking**. Click here to see how to set up a **gas grill**. Here's how to set up a

charcoal grill, and here's how to set up a bullet smoker like the **Weber Smokey Mountain**. Get the temp stabilized at about 235°F. We want to cook at about 225°F, but the temp will drop a bit once you load in the cold meat.

5) **Cook**. Put the meat on the cooker. On a smoker with a water pan, put the meat right above the water. Place the oven temp probe on the grate next to the meat. Add about 4 ounces of **wood** right after the meat goes on. When the smoke stops, add 4 ounces more for the first 2 hours, usually about every 30 minutes. Keep an eye on the water in the pan. Don't let it dry out. After 3 hours, turn the meat over if the color is different from top to bottom. Otherwise leave it alone. No need to mop, baste, or spritz. It just lowers the temp of the meat. The meat temp will move steadily upward to **the stall**, somewhere around 150°F. Once in the stall zone, it will seem to take forever to rise. The stall can last 5 hours and the temp may not rise more than 5°F!

6) **Texas Crutch**. After *about* 2 to 4 hours, by which time the meat will have hit about 150°F, take it off and wrap it *tightly* in a double layer of heavy-duty foil. We have learned that the more airspace around the meat the more juice leaks out. Pour 1/2 cup of beef broth around the sides of the meat being careful not to wash off the rub before you seal the foil. Then crimp it tight and put the wrapped meat back on the smoker or move it to an indoor oven at 225°F. This step, called the **Texas Crutch**, slightly **braises** the meat, but most importantly, it prevents surface evaporation which cools the meat and causes the stall. If you wrap the meat at 150°F it will power right through the stall and cut your cooking time significantly.

7) **Hold**. When the temp hits 200 to 205°F, get your plastic beer cooler, line it with a towel, blanket, or crumpled newspaper and put the meat, still in foil, into the cooler on top of the lining. Leave the thermometer probe in. If the foil is leaking fluids, put the meat in a large pan first. The lining is important to prevent the plastic from warping or cracking. Close the lid and let the hot meat sit in the cooler for at least 2 to 3 hours until you are ready to eat. If you have a tight cooler it should hold the meat well above 160°F for hours.



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8) **Optional: Burnt ends.** Burnt ends (right) are amazingly flavorful bite-size crispy cubes. Originally they were simply edges and ends that were overcooked and trimmed off and munched by the kitchen staff. If there were any leftover, they were given away for free. Then, in 1970, in his marvelous book *American Fried*, Calvin Trillin wrote the following about Arthur Bryant's restaurant in Kansas City "The main course at Bryant's, as far as I'm concerned, is something that is given away for free -- the burned edges of the brisket. The counterman just pushes them over to the side as he slices the beef, and anyone who wants them helps himself. I dream of those burned edges. Sometimes, when I'm in some awful overpriced restaurant in some strange town -- all of my restaurant-finding techniques having failed, so that I'm left to choke down something that costs seven dollars and tastes like a medium-rare sponge -- a blank look comes over my face: I have just realized that at that very moment someone in Kansas City is being given those burned edges *free*."

In a frying pan, render about 1/2 pound of the beef fat that you trimmed from the brisket. Or cheat and use bacon fat or duck fat. You can do this over hot coals. Cut the point into 1/2" to 3/4" cubes. Discard any pieces that are too fatty. Put the cubes in the pan and gently fry the cubes until they are crunchy on the outside. Add about 1/4 cup of your sauce and 1/4 cup of the drippings from the foil used for the Texas Crutch. Put the pan back on the cooker in a hot spot and close the lid. Stir them every 5 minutes or so. Let the cubes absorb most of the liquid and start to fry in the fat again, but don't let them burn. When they're done, keep them warm in the faux cambro with the flat.

9) **Slice.** Don't slice until the last possible minute. Brisket dries out quickly once it is cut. If you wish, you can firm up the crust a bit by unwrapping the meat and putting it over a hot grill or under a broiler for a few minutes on each side. Watch it closely so it doesn't burn. When your guests are ready, heat up your **Texas Barbecue Mop-**

Sauce and bring it to the table. Turn the meat fat side up so the juices will run onto the meat as you slice.

Slicing is a bit of a challenge because there are two muscles and the grain flows in different directions. There are two good ways to slice:

(a) This is my favorite method, shown in the pictures at right. Start slicing the flat, cutting across the grain so the meat will fall apart in your mouth about 1/4" thick, about the thickness of a pencil. As you approach the area where the point muscle lies on top of the flat, stop and cut the remaining hunk in half. Slice the center section crosswise, in the opposite direction that you sliced the flat. Then slice the remaining butt section in the same direction you sliced the flat.

(b) Some competitors prefer this method of slicing. Run a knife between the flat and the point and separate the two muscles. Trim off excess fat. Slice them separately across the grain about 1/4" thick. The meat should hold together, not fall apart or crumble. It should pull apart with a gentle tug. If the first slice falls apart, cut thicker slices. Here is a picture of the brisket entry by KCBS President Candy Weaver. Nice even slices of flat with the smoke ring on top surrounded by chunks of burnt ends.



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10) **Serving.** If the meat is perfectly cooked it should be moist and juicy. You can serve it simply sliced on a plate or as a sandwich made with Texas Toast. If you wish, drizzle some **Texas Barbecue Mop-Sauce** mixed with some of the drippings from the crutch on top of the meat (taste this carefully because the drippings can be very salty from the rub). Serve everyone a little of both muscles. In the picture above we see a typical turn-in box by a competition team. Identical slices of flat fanned out like a deck of cards surrounded by chunks of burnt ends from the point.

Cook today, serve tomorrow

I often get asked what's the best way to cook brisket Saturday and serve it on Sunday. My answer is "don't do it". That's called serving leftovers.

These meats are best fresh off the smoker. If you have to serve it at noon on Sunday, then start cooking before you go to bed.

If you don't want to cook overnight then consider serving something that doesn't take so long, like **smoked turkey** or **baby back ribs**.

If you absolutely positively must cook it Saturday to serve Sunday, **there is a technique I describe in this article**.

Leftovers

If you have leftovers that you will not be able to scarf down in a few days, mix the leftovers with a bit of barbecue sauce or the jus from the Texas Crutch if it is not too salty, and freeze everything in zipper bags or vacuum bags. The sauce prevents freezer burn. Pop one in the microwave and you've got a great emergency meal for two.

Brisket the following day is best reheated in the microwave a small amount at a time. But it will be a bit drier and tougher than the first day, so bring back some life with a splash of water, apple juice, Texas Crutch jus, or barbecue sauce. The best method is in the microwave, second best is to heat it slowly in a pot with the lid on.

Here's are some other ideas for leftover brisket:

- ☞ **Shepherd's Pie.** Probably the best thing I've ever done with leftover brisket is Shepherd's Pie. This classic Irish peasant casserole was a hearty meal for sheep herders, often served midday. There are hundreds of variations on the theme, but it is essentially meat and potatoes in two layers. Here's the core concept: Brown veggies and cubes of lamb in a deep pan or casserole. Whup up some mashed potatoes, and pile them on top. Put them in the oven and bake.

So here's what I did: On Sunday I did brisket and **garlic mashed**. I browned carrots, celery, onion, and frozen peas, and then tossed in cubes of leftover brisket, some of the *jus* that was in the foil when I did my Texas Crutch (not too much, it's strong stuff), and some beef stock leftover from the last time I did a **Prime Rib** (beef broth will do). Topped them with about 2" of leftover garlic mashed. Painted the top with butter, sprinkled on some **parmesan cheese** and bread crumbs, and baked the whole shootin' match in the oven until the top was brown. OMG.

- ☞ Brisket enchiladas. **Slow's Bar-B-Q** in Detroit is famous for their brisket enchiladas. They are made by sautéing onions, tossing in some sliced brisket and a splash of hot sauce, Worcestershire sauce, and their house secret sauce. They then dump it on a tortilla, top it with grated smoked gouda cheese, roll it up, grate some American cheese on top, and give it a squirt of hot sauce for good measure.
- ☞ **Stir fry.** Believe it or not, leftover brisket is great in a Chinese stir-fry with onions, carrots, broccoli, and a **soy/sesame oil/hoisin** sauce with a splash of hot sauce on a bed of rice.
- ☞ **Hash.** John R. Crowley in Denver says he likes to chop leftovers up in beans or fry it up in some hash.
- ☞ **On scrambled eggs or salads.** Bill Martin likes his leftovers chopped up in scrambled eggs and on top of a salad.

- ☞ **Italian beef sandwiches.** Lucy Baker says "Make **Italian beef-style sandwiches** with very cooked (limp) green and red bell peppers, onion, and a little Italian seasoning. Reheat the beef in broth and spoon over crusty bread before adding the beef and peppers. Yikes!"
- ☞ **Quesadillas.** Merrill Powers in Elmhurst, Illinois, makes quesadillas with his leftovers.
- ☞ **Chili.** Dave Frary makes **chili** with his leftovers.
- ☞ **Burritos.** Danny Gaulden makes burritos.
- ☞ **I don't know what to call this but I want to eat it.** Rodney Leist from Elfrida, Arizona, kills several different leftovers in one dish. He puts one of those single serving bags of corn chips in a bowl, adds a big scoop of leftover chopped brisket, a similar amount of leftover smoked sausage, and a similar amount of beans. On goes some leftover sauce, chopped onions, chopped jalapeños, and grated cheese. The whole thing gets heated in the microwave.
- ☞ **Trade bait.** Buzz Dean of in Wisconsin, says he takes his leftovers to the pub and trades it for beer!

Tell us below what you do with leftover brisket (if you have any).



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Keys to success

- 1) **Buy USDA Choice or better meat.** Do not just pick up whatever your butcher has on display. Get USDA Choice grade meat or higher. If you have to special order it, then order it. If you start with USDA Select or below you will have a hard time elevating it beyond shoe leather.
- 2) **Use a good digital thermometer** to monitor your cooker and another to monitor the meat. Your smoker's dial thermometer is wrong. Don't trust it. The Maverick remote is perfect for this job. Step into the digital age.
- 3) **Use a whole packer if you can.** Small pieces, like a four pound hunk o' flat (HOF) or hunk o' point (HOP) lose a lot of moisture, shrink a lot, and get tough.
- 4) **Inject.** Injecting with beef broth, **brine**, or specially formulated injection helps combat dehydration, and the salt enhances flavor.
- 5) **Wrap the meat in foil when it hits 150°F.** This tenderizes and moisturizes, but

most importantly it powers through the stall, a long delay during which the temp stops rising. It can last for up to 5 hours. The stall is caused by the meat sweating and cooling from evaporation. Foiling the meat powers through the stall and delivers moister meat.

6) **Finishing indoors is cheating, but nobody will arrest you.** If you're having trouble controlling the temperature of your outdoor cooker, and most charcoal cookers are hard to control for long sessions, cook outdoors until the meat hits 150°F, wrap in foil, and then move it indoors. It still may stall for an hour or 2 at about 170°F. Wait it out.

7) **Hold.** When it hits 200 or 205°F in the flat, hold it in a 170°F oven or wrap it with towels or a blanket and let it rest in a beer cooler for 2 to 3 hours. It continues to cook, but the internal temp slowly drops. This helps tenderize but also gives you leeway before serving if the cooking takes longer than anticipated.

8) **Start earlier than you think you should.** If the meat is ready before the guests, fine. It will be just fine wrapped in foil in a beer cooler or a holding oven. Better the meat should wait than the guests. Exact timing is impossible to predict.

9) **Timing.** The most important determinants are how thick the meat is and what temp you cooker is averaging. But humidity, ambient air temp, wind, rain, grade of meat, can all play a role. There is no precise formula. That said, plan on 16 to 18 hours for a whole packer if you wrap it in foil, plus two hours to rest. Add on another hour or two in case it takes longer than expected. If you don't wrap in foil, 18 to 20 hours plus two hours rest is a good estimate. For flats, 10 to 12 hours with wrapping, 12 to 14 hours without foil.

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Cooking more than one

I frequently get asked how to handle cooking two briskets (or more) or a shoulder and a brisket, or a shoulder, brisket, ribs, and a muskrat. The answer is here, in my article on **Cooking More Than One Large Hunk 'O Meat.**

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Sides

Brisket achieves its apogee on the blackened pulley pits of Central Texas, so I always serve it Texas style. The smokey meat slices lounge on a thick slice of Texas Toast with only a few spoons of a thin, tart, tomato-soup like sauce, none of that thick sweet Kansas City stuff. Brisket needs sugar like steers need wolves.

On the side, I like to honor the Mexican heritage of Texas cooking with frijoles, **simple pinto beans cooked cowboy style**, with some fatback or bacon, onion, garlic, a few chopped tomatoes, scented with bay leaves and cumin, and sprinkled with fresh minced jalapeño. Absolutely positively none of those sweet Yankee beans.

The wolf law holds for beef sides too.

Then, honoring the European heritage of many of the great Texas barbecue joints surrounding Austin, I want a mound of **German Potato Salad**, warm and pungent with vinegar, and dotted with celery seed.

Next to it I want a scoop of fresh, crunchy sauerkraut from the fridge. None of that soggy canned stuff.

To honor the Czech heritage of the numerous Texas butcher shops turned barbecue joints, I chase the whole thing with a tallboy, a simple uncomplicated Pilsner style Texas brew, straight from the bottle.

Dessert has to be crunchy, gooey pecan pie with black coffee. Pecans are a major cash crop of the Lone Star State, and my favorite pie bar none.



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"I adapted your **brisket rub** recipe this summer and my customers love it (8,000 pounds served in the past 6 months)! My brisket even won 'best beef' in the Sonoma County Harvest Fair this year (2010)." Larry Vito of **BBQ Smokehouse** in Sebastapol, CA

Left-handed briskets?

Tom Hoefer from Allen, Texas, posted this tall tale about a barbecue contest on the net in 2001. It is reprinted here, slightly edited, with his permission. Fact or fiction? Serious or joke? You decide...

A few year back at the Texas State Finals, several of us arrived on Thursday to get in line for the best sites. Thursday night was devoted to serious drinking.

One of the better cooks, Ole Connie Baker of the team "Li'l Pit Of Heaven", was throwing back quite a few of those Mexican beers with a chunk of lime stuck in the neck. Connie had so many of them limeade beers that he was starting to smile with a pucker.

One of us asked him how come his brisket was so tender and always placed in the top three. I thought to myself, boy oh boy, if loose lips sink ships then Ole Connie is going down tonight. All got quiet as he stuffed another lime in a longneck and he said that he "only cooks left-handed briskets".

He explained that most, but not all, steers rest on their left side, which means when they get up they have to push harder with their right legs. At this point about half the bunch mumbled something to the effect of "bull hockey" and went back to different conversations.

A few of us noticed that Ole Connie wasn't smirking. Two or three of us moved closer and I said to him, "You can't stop there. What does pushing up with their right legs have to do with the left brisket?"

Ole Connie stuffed another lime and told us that when they push up with the right legs, it flexes the right brisket muscle more than the left. Therefore the right-handed brisket will be tougher and less marbled than the left. Not always but usually. I asked him, "How the heck do you tell a left-handed brisket from the right?"

He stuffed another lime and told me that, with the fat side down, on a left-handed brisket, with the narrow part closest to you, the point will curve to the right.

Saturday awards time rolled around and Connie took First Brisket and Grand Champion over 180 of the best cooks in Texas. I think that I came in 19th with my right-handed brisket.

I just could not get this off my mind. I phoned the kin folk in LaGrange, Texas, and asked if they would check out their herd. Yep, you guessed it. Only three out of 37 consistently rested on their right side. Dangnation, Ole Connie has got it going big time!

I went to five different grocery stores and flexed briskets to see which sides were more limber and more marbled. There are some right-handed briskets that are more limber and marbled than the lefties, but for the most part, the majority of the best are left handed!

Welp, there it is folks. Take it or leave it. As Joe Friday on the 1950s TV show, Dragnet, used to say, "Only the facts, ma'am."

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Competition brisket

One of these days we'll do a whole article about how the top teams cook brisket. They go to extremes to make it look pretty and make the one bite the judges take

extraordinary. For a glimpse, click [here to download from iTunes](#) **Greg Rempe's BBQ Central podcast on the subject** with a panel of three top competition cooks.

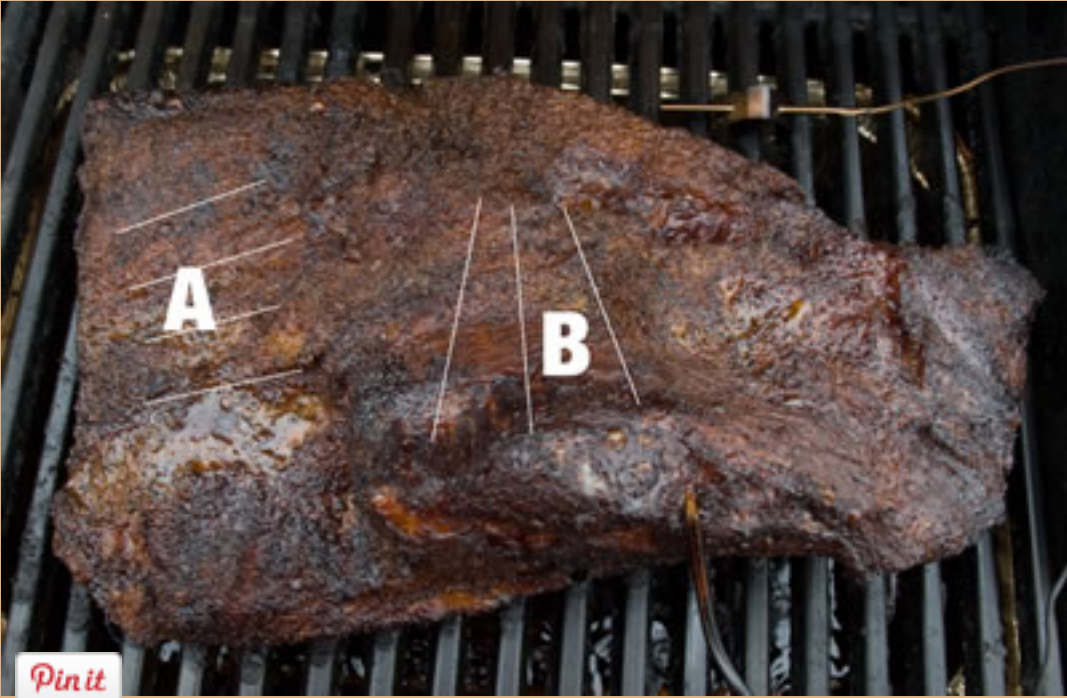


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Click here for more photos of brisket and the **Austin Barbecue Belt**.

Slicing brisket



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In this photo you can see the grain in the meat. The point muscle sits on top of the flat muscle. The point is thin on one end (A) and thick on the other (B). The thickness of the slab varies significantly, from 1" at the left and right edge, to 4" or more at the crown of the point.

I recommend two methods for carving. The easy way, which works fine, and the Sorkin method, which I learned from Barry Sorkin of Chicago's **Smoque BBQ**. He makes my favorite brisket *in the world*.

The easy way

Lop off about 1" from the thick end and about 2" from the tip of the flat. Both these

are likely overcooked and dry. Chop them and smother them in sauce for chopped brisket.

Then find the fat layer between the point and flat and slide your blade between the two muscles separating them. Trim off all the excess fat. Find the grain of the meat and cut across the grain and offer your guests "lean" and "fatty". Most will chose the lean which will leave the better, fattier, point cut for you.

The Sorkin method

In the photos below, Sorkin demonstrates how he slices brisket.



Start by separating the drier thin part of the flat and set it aside for chopping, not slicing.



Then slice the thick center part of the flat across the grain until you encounter the point muscle on top of the flat. In the photo above he is within one or two slices from hitting the point. These are the slices that most competitors use because they produce a visually pleasing presentation of nearly identical slices.



He then goes into the layer of fat between the point and flat at the thick butt end and removes much of the fat. It can be 1/2" thick or more in there and that makes the slices inedible.



The remaining hunk has both muscles, the point sitting on top of the flat, with the grain going in different directions. He slices this hunk in half.



The right section is a butt end with one cut edge. The left section, from the middle of the brisket, has two cut edges.



Slice the center section as shown, from the outer edge in.



Slice the remaining butt end of the point in the same direction as you cut the flat, continuing to cut parallel to the cut end.



Sorkin then fans the slices on a bun. Notice the line separating flat and point.



Thin parts of the flat are chopped and some of the fat from between the point and flat is mixed in for moisture. The results are crunchy, heavily seasoned, and juicy. They can also be splashed with sauce, and served on a bun.

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