

Kansas City Sticky Ribs

Serves 4 to 6

We like St. Louis style racks, but if you can't find them, baby back ribs will work fine; reduce the oven time in step 6 to 1 to 2 hours.

RIBS

3 tablespoons paprika

2 tablespoons brown sugar

1 tablespoon salt

1 tablespoon black pepper

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 (2 1/2 to 3 lbs) full racks pork spareribs (see note), trimmed of any large pieces of fat and membrane removed

SAUCE

1 tablespoon vegetable oil plus more for cooking grate

1 onion, minced

Salt

4 cups low sodium chicken broth

1 cup root beer

1 cup cider vinegar

1 cup dark corn syrup

1/2 cup light or mild molasses

1/2 cup ketchup

1/2 cup tomato paste

2 tablespoons brown mustard

1 tablespoon hot sauce

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/4 teaspoon liquid smoke

Pepper

2 cups wood chips, soaked, drained and sealed in a foil packet

1. FOR THE RIBS: Combine the paprika, sugar, salt, black pepper, and cayenne in a bowl. Pat the ribs dry with paper towel, and rub them evenly with the spice mixture. Wrap the meat in plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for at least 1 hour, or refrigerate for up to 24 hours. (If refrigerated, let sit at room temperature for 1 hour before grilling).

2. FOR THE SAUCE: Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add the onion and a pinch of salt and cook until softened 5 to 7 minutes. Whisk in the broth, root beer, vinegar, corn syrup, molasses, tomato paste, ketchup, mustard, hot sauce, and garlic powder. Bring the sauce to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until reduce to 4 cups, about 1 hour. Stir in the liquid smoke. Cool to room temperature, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Measure out 1 cup of the barbecue sauce for cooking; set aside the remaining sauce for serving. (The sauce can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to 4 days).

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open the bottom grill vents halfway. Light a large chimney starter three quarters full with charcoal (4 1/2 quarts, about 75 briquettes) and allow it to burn until the charcoal is partially covered with a layer of fine gray ash, about 20 minutes. Pour the coals into a steeply banked pile against 1 side of the grill and place the wood chip packet on top of the coals. Set the cooking grate in place, cover, and open the lid vents halfway. Heat the grill until hot and the wood chips begin to smoke heavily, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Place the wood chip packet directly on the primary burner. Turn all the burners to high, cover and heat the grill until hot and the wood chips begin to smoke heavily, about 15 minutes. Turn the primary burner to medium high and turn off the other burner(s). Adjust the primary burner as needed to maintain the grill temperature around 325 degrees.

4. Use a grill brush to scrape the cooking grate clean. Lightly dip a wad of paper towels in oil; holding the wad with tongs, wipe the cooking grate. Place the ribs, meat side down, on the cooler side of the grill, away from the coals or flames; the ribs may overlap slightly. Place a sheet of foil on top of the ribs. Cover (positioning the lid vents over the meat if using charcoal) and cook until the ribs are deep red and smoky, about 2 hours, flipping and rotating the racks halfway through. During the final 20 minutes of grilling, adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 250 degrees.

5. Remove the ribs from the grill, brush them evenly with the 1 cup sauce reserved for cooking, and wrap tightly with foil. Lay the foil wrapped ribs on a rimmed baking sheet and continue to cook in the oven until tender and a fork inserted into the ribs meets no resistance, 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours.

6. Remove the ribs from the oven and let rest, still wrapped, for 30 minutes. Unwrap the ribs and brush them thickly with 1 cup of the sauce set aside for serving. Slice the ribs between the bones and serve with the remaining sauce.