**Barbecued Pulled Chicken**

**Why this recipe works:**

When cooking whole chickens, the white meat can dry out while the longer-cooking dark meat comes up to temperature. Brining the birds keeps the white meat moist and juicy, and arranging the chickens on the grill with the breast meat farther from the heat source evens out the cooking times.When cooking whole chickens, the white meat can dry out while the longer-cooking dark meat comes up to temperature. Brining the birds keeps the white meat moist and juicy, and arranging the chickens on the grill with the breast meat farther from the heat source evens out the cooking times. Increasing the vinegar in our favorite barbecue sauce balanced the sweetness that otherwise overwhelmed the chicken, and replacing the root beer with coffee boosted the smoky flavor.

[less](http://www.cookscountry.com/recipes/7034-barbecued-pulled-chicken)

**Barbecued Pulled Chicken**

It takes time for smoke to penetrate, which is why most pulled chicken has dried out by the time it's sufficiently smoky. We wanted plenty of smoke and tender, moist meat.

**Makes enough for 8 sandwiches**

We prefer to halve the chickens ourselves, but you may be able to buy the four halves or get your butcher to halve them for you.

**Ingredients**

* **CHICKEN**
* 1 cup salt
* 2 (4-pound) [whole chickens](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/567-whole-chickens), giblets discarded
* Pepper
* 2 cups wood chips, soaked in water for 15 minutes and drained
* **SAUCE**
* 2 teaspoons [vegetable oil](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/489-all-purpose-vegetable-oils)
* 1 onion, chopped fine
* 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
* 1 1/4 cups [cider vinegar](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/312-cider-vinegar)
* 1 cup brewed coffee
* 3/4 cup [molasses](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/549-molasses)
* 1/2 cup [tomato paste](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/516-tomato-paste)
* 1/2 cup [ketchup](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/540-ketchup)
* 2 tablespoons brown mustard
* 1 tablespoon [hot sauce](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/255-hot-sauces)
* 1/2 teaspoon [garlic powder](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/563-garlic-powder)
* 1/4 teaspoon [liquid smoke](http://www.cookscountry.com/taste_tests/395-liquid-smoke)

**Instructions**

1. **1. FOR THE CHICKEN:** Dissolve salt in 4 quarts cold water in large container. Remove backbones from chickens and split chickens in half lengthwise through center of breast bone. Using metal skewer, poke 20 holes all over each chicken half. Submerge chicken halves in brine, cover, and refrigerate for 1 hour. Remove chicken halves from brine, pat dry with paper towels, and season with pepper. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in foil packet and cut several vent holes in top.

**2. FOR THE SAUCE:** Meanwhile, heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Whisk in broth, vinegar, coffee, molasses, tomato paste, ketchup, mustard, hot sauce, and garlic powder and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until mixture is thick and reduced to 4 cups, about 65 to 75 minutes. Stir in liquid smoke (sauce can be made up to 2 days in advance); reserve 1 cup sauce for serving.

**3A.** For a charcoal grill: Open bottom vent halfway. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour into steeply banked pile against side of grill. Place wood chip packet on coals. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent halfway. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

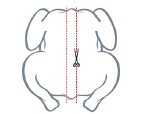
**3B.** For a gas grill: Place wood chip packet over primary burner. Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burners.

**4.** Clean and oil cooking grate. Place chicken halves skin side up on cool side of grill with legs closest to heat source. Cover and cook until breasts register 160 degrees and thighs register 175 degrees, 75 to 85 minutes. Transfer chicken to carving board, tent loosely with foil, and let rest until cool enough to handle, about 15 minutes. Remove and discard skin. Pull meat off bones, separating dark and light meat. Roughly chop dark meat into ½-inch pieces. Shred white meat into thin strands.

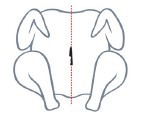
**5.** Add chicken to pot with sauce and cook over medium-low heat until chicken is warmed through, about 5 minutes. Serve on hamburger rolls, passing reserved sauce separately.

**Halving Chickens**

By starting with whole chickens, you are assured of equal-size halves, which will cook evenly on the grill. Here's how we divide one whole into two halves:



**FIRST REMOVE THE BACKBONE:** Place the chicken breast side down on a cutting board. Use sharp kitchen shears to cut along either side of the backbone; remove backbone.



**THEN FLIP, FLATTEN, AND SPLIT:** Turn the chicken breast side up and use your hand to flatten. Use a chef's knife to cut through the bone in the center, creating two halves.