

# South Carolina Pulled Pork

## Secrets to SMOKY, MUSTARDY PULLED PORK



1. Rubbing the pork shoulder with a spice mixture that's heavy on the dry mustard ensures a mustardy crust.
2. Slow-cooking the pork with a packet of smoking wood chips gives the meat plenty of smoke flavor.
3. Brushing the pork with the mustardy barbecue sauce before it goes into the oven produces a second hit of mustard flavor.
4. Tossing the shredded pork with the remaining sauce gives the meat a final layer of mustard flavor.

Slathering a tangy mustard-based sauce on barbecued pork is a good start, but this regional specialty demands more than just a last-minute dose of bold flavors.

**T**hroughout America's barbecue belt, pit masters balance the meaty richness of pulled pork by dressing it with all manner of barbecue sauces. On a recent trip to South Carolina—to Columbia and Charleston, to be exact—I discovered a mustard-based sauce I'd never tried before. Nicknamed Carolina gold, this sauce originated in the state's Midlands area, with historians at the South Carolina Barbecue Association attributing it to the mustard-loving German immigrants who settled there in the 1700s. This savory, tangy barbecue was so good I ate it for lunch, mid-afternoon snack, and dinner for two days running on my trip.

I was determined to re-create this barbecue in the test kitchen. After years of testing, we've perfected an easy cooking technique in which boneless pork shoulder is rubbed with dry spices (to help it develop a flavorful crust) before being slow-smoked on the grill for a few hours. Once the pork has taken on plenty of smoke, it's wrapped in foil and allowed to gently steam to tenderness in the convenience of a low oven before being shredded and sauced.

There was one issue to address before I figured out how to re-create the sauce—the spice rub. Since Carolina gold is largely about mustard, I wanted to see if I could use the rub to jump-start the mustard flavor. To a basic mixture of sugar, salt, pepper, paprika, and cayenne I added a tablespoon of dry mustard. Tasters approved, but wanted more mustard. It took a full 3 tablespoons to get a solid mustard punch from the rub, which cooked into a rich,

spicy crust on the grill.

Most authentic South Carolina sauces use regular yellow mustard, but I wanted to see if another kind of mustard might work better. Tasters found the German, English, Dijon, and powdered mustards too overpowering. Spicy brown mustard was deemed “murky tasting,” while honey mustard introduced an unwelcome extra sweetener to the mix. Yellow mustard was the clear favorite, with tasters praising its bright, assertive tang.

For the other sauce ingredients, tasters preferred rich brown sugar to white sugar, honey, or molasses. White vinegar lent an uncomplicated sharpness that augmented the tang of the mustard. While most barbecue sauces are built on a foundation of onions and garlic, I was surprised that tasters thought their distinct flavors competed with the mustard, and preferred the sauce without them. A little savory Worcestershire and hot sauce rounded out the flavors of the sauce, which tasters

preferred uncooked to preserve its brash flavors.

The sauce was such a success that I wondered if I could get additional mileage from it. I increased the proportions to yield a little extra, which I then spread on the meat before putting it into the oven. The spicy, smoky crust was good to begin with, but now it was even thicker, tangier, and more deeply flavored. This barbecued pulled pork really struck gold—Carolina gold!

—Adam Ried



Our pulled pork is flavored with a no-cook mustard sauce and piled high on hamburger buns.

## SOUTH CAROLINA PULLED PORK SERVES 8

Pork shoulder—usually labeled pork butt or Boston butt—comes both boneless (usually wrapped in netting) or on the bone. The boneless roast is easier to handle, but either one can be used in this recipe. If your roast weighs more than 5 pounds, plan on an extra 30 to 60 minutes of oven time. The cooked meat can be shredded or chopped.

### Spice Rub and Pork

- 3 tablespoons dry mustard
- 1½ tablespoons light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 2 teaspoons pepper
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 (4- to 5-pound) boneless pork shoulder roast (see note)
- 4 cups wood chips, soaked for 15 minutes

### Mustard Barbecue Sauce

- ½ cup yellow mustard
- ½ cup packed light brown sugar
- ¼ cup white vinegar
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon hot sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper

**1. For the spice rub and pork:** Combine dry mustard, brown sugar, salt, pepper, paprika, and cayenne, breaking up any lumps. Dry pork with paper towels and rub all over with spice mixture. (Roast can be wrapped tightly in plastic and refrigerated for 24 hours.)

**2.** Seal wood chips in foil packet and cut vent holes in top. Open bottom vent on grill. Light 50 coals; when covered with fine gray ash, pour in pile on one side of grill. Arrange foil packet directly on coals. Set cooking grate in place and heat, covered, with lid vent open halfway until wood chips begin to smoke heavily, about 5 minutes. (For gas grill, place foil packet directly on primary burner. Heat all burners on high, covered, until wood chips begin to smoke heavily, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and shut other burner[s] off.) Scrape and oil cooking grate. Place pork on cool side of grill and barbecue, covered, until exterior of pork has a rosy crust, about 2 hours.

**3. For the mustard barbecue sauce and to finish:** Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Whisk mustard, brown sugar, vinegar, Worcestershire, hot sauce, salt, and pepper in bowl until smooth. Transfer pork to roasting pan and brush ½ cup sauce over meat. Cover roasting pan tightly with foil and bake until fork inserted into pork can be removed with no resistance, 2 to 3 hours. Remove from oven and rest, still wrapped in foil, for 30 minutes. Unwrap pork and, when cool enough to handle, pull meat into thin shreds, discarding fat, if desired. Toss pork with remaining sauce. Serve.

## The American Table: The Barbecue Sauces of the Carolinas

The most austere of the Carolina barbecue sauces is found in eastern North Carolina, where shredded or chopped whole hog is typically dressed with a pungent sauce of vinegar, sugar, and black pepper. Central and western North Carolina barbecue sauces introduce the tomato, often in the form of ketchup, to this basic sauce. And when you travel down to South Carolina, you'll find barbecue sauces (like the one in this recipe) based on yellow mustard. They're all delicious with pork barbecue.

# On the Side: Apple-Cabbage Slaw

What are the secrets to tender cabbage, crunchy apples, and the sweet and spicy dressing that brings them together in this Southern barbecue side dish?



In most parts of the country, "coleslaw" means one thing: shredded cabbage dressed with mayonnaise. But south of the Mason-Dixon line, you'll find lighter, brighter slaws enlivened by dressing made with oil and vinegar. One such Southern slaw features chopped cabbage studded with refreshing bits of apple. The sweet, tangy, and spicy flavors of the dressing make this slaw the perfect accompaniment to barbecue. But as early test recipes revealed, this simple side dish can go awry, especially if the apples are mushy, the cabbage is chewy, and the dressing just pools up at the bottom of the bowl.

I started by chopping a single head of green cabbage, which gave me a sturdier foundation than preshredded coleslaw mix. Since cabbage is a relatively watery vegetable, the test kitchen typically salts cut cabbage to draw out excess moisture before dressing it;

this prevents the moisture from releasing into the dressing later, thus diluting it.

I tested several varieties of apple, but most were mushy and bland when dressed. The one exception was Granny Smith, which tasters loved for its sturdy crunch and tart bite. Grating the apples negated their crunch, but cutting them into matchsticks meant they could be easily mixed with the cabbage while retaining their crispness.

The classic dressing calls for sugar, white vinegar, vegetable oil, and various seasonings. I tried swapping out the granulated sugar for more flavorful brown sugar, maple syrup, and honey, but in the end nothing beat the clean sweetness of regular sugar. Cider vinegar contributed a fruity flavor lacking in the traditional white vinegar. Red pepper flakes, chopped scallions, and mustard added some punch. The dressing tasted pretty good, but it

wasn't clinging to the cabbage and apples.

A few recipes that I'd found in my research heated the dressing and poured it—still hot—over the slaw. I tried this and was pleased to discover that the cabbage and apples more readily absorbed a hot dressing—especially if the slaw was allowed to sit for an hour before serving. Piled on top of a pulled pork sandwich or standing on its own, this tangy slaw will be a fresh new addition to any summer barbecue.

—Meredith Butcher

## TANGY APPLE-CABBAGE SLAW SERVES 6 TO 8

In step 1, the salted, rinsed, and dried cabbage can be refrigerated in a zipper-lock bag for up to 24 hours. To prep the apples, cut the cored apples into ¼-inch-thick planks, then stack the planks and cut them into thin matchsticks.

- 1 medium head green cabbage, cored and chopped fine
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 Granny Smith apples, cored and cut into thin matchsticks (see note)
- 2 scallions, sliced thin
- 6 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ½ cup cider vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

**1.** Toss cabbage and salt in colander set over medium bowl. Let stand until wilted, about 1 hour. Rinse cabbage under cold water, drain, dry well with paper towels, and transfer to large bowl. Add apples and scallions and toss to combine.

**2.** Bring oil, vinegar, sugar, mustard, and pepper flakes to boil in saucepan over medium heat. Pour over cabbage mixture and toss to coat. Cover with plastic and refrigerate at least 1 hour or up to 1 day. Serve.