

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

The Backyard BBQ Field Pack

A companion to The Backyard BBQ & Smoking Bible · by Dale Kettering

Thanks for picking up the book. This is the companion you tape right to the grill lid: the meat temps so nothing's a guess, the wood-pairing chart so the smoke fits the cut, the two-zone fire setup that fixes most of what goes wrong, three rubs and sauces you can build from what's already in the pantry, and a timing sheet so the ribs, the sides, and the folks all land at the table hot. Print it, fold it, keep it by the grill.

Thirty years over a fire taught me the same lesson over and over: the meat tells you when it's ready, the clock never does. A thermometer and a little patience will out-cook a fancy rig every single time. Cook the meat, not the clock. — Dale

The Meat Temp Card — Pull Temps, Not Guesses

Buy a cheap instant-read thermometer. It's the one tool that turns "I think it's done" into "I know it's done." These are the temps to pull at — the meat keeps cooking after it comes off.

What you're cooking	Pull it at	Done feel / note
Burgers	160°F (or 155°F + rest)	Firm, juices run clear; ground beef gets no benefit from pink
Chicken (breast)	160°F	Carries to 165°F resting; pull early or it dries out
Chicken (thigh/leg)	175°F	Dark meat is better a little higher — more tender
Pork chops	140°F	Carries to 145°F; a faint blush of pink is fine and good
Ribs	Bend-test, ~195–203°F	Lift with tongs — they should crack and bow, not snap
Brisket	200–203°F	Probe slides in "like warm butter" — temp is a guide, feel is the judge
Pulled pork (shoulder)	200–205°F	The bone pulls clean; collagen has melted to soft

The carryover rule: a roast or a thick cut keeps climbing 5–10°F after it leaves the heat. Pull early and let it rest tented under foil — 10 minutes for chops and chicken, 30–60 for brisket and shoulder. Resting is part of the cook, not a delay.

The Wood-Pairing Chart

Smoke is a seasoning, not a fog. You want thin blue smoke drifting off — almost invisible. Thick white or gray smoke means the wood's smoldering dirty, and it'll leave the meat bitter. Burn clean and feed the fire small.

Wood	What it suits	Character
Hickory	Pork, ribs, brisket — the all-rounder	Strong, bacon-like; easy to overdo, go light
Oak	Brisket, beef, big cuts	Medium, steady, honest — the backbone wood
Pecan	Pork, poultry, anything	Mellow hickory cousin; forgiving, hard to overdo
Apple	Pork, chicken, ribs	Sweet, mild, light fruit; great for long cooks
Cherry	Poultry, pork, mixing	Mild, sweet, gives a beautiful mahogany color
Mesquite	Beef, hot-and-fast, searing	Bold and earthy; burns hot, use a little for short cooks

Mixing is fair game: oak for the heat and backbone, a chunk of apple or cherry tucked in for sweetness and color. When in doubt, less wood. You can always add — you can't take it back out.

The Two-Zone Fire — The Setup That Fixes Most Problems

Almost every backyard cooking sin — burnt outside, raw middle, constant flare-ups — comes from cooking everything directly over the coals. Build two zones instead and you control the whole cook.

1. Bank the coals to one side (or light only one side of a gas grill). Now you have a hot/direct zone over the fire and a cool/indirect zone with no fire under it.
2. Sear over the hot side, finish over the cool side. Get color and crust direct, then slide the food to the indirect side with the lid down to cook through gently.
3. Flare-up? Just move it. Slide the food to the cool zone and the fat stops feeding the flame. No more black chicken.
4. For low-and-slow (ribs, pork, brisket): keep the food entirely on the indirect side, lid down, and let the trapped heat work like an oven.

The one vent rule: the bottom intake vent controls your fire; the top exhaust vent stays mostly open. More air in = hotter. To raise the temp, open the bottom vent. To lower it, close the bottom vent down. Choking the top traps dirty smoke — leave it cracked open so smoke pulls clean across the meat. Make small adjustments and wait 10 minutes; the fire answers slowly.

Three From-the-Pantry Recipes

No special order, nothing fancy. These are built from what's already in most kitchens.

All-Purpose BBQ Rub

Good on pork, chicken, ribs, and brisket. Makes about a cup.

Ingredient	Amount
Brown sugar	1/4 cup
Coarse salt (kosher)	1/4 cup
Paprika	2 tbsp
Black pepper, coarse	1 tbsp
Garlic powder	1 tbsp
Onion powder	1 tbsp
Chili powder	1 tbsp
Cayenne (optional)	1 tsp

Stir it all together, store in a jar. Pat the meat dry, coat it, and let it sit while the fire comes up. For brisket, drop the sugar and lean on the salt and pepper.

Texas-Style Mop

A thin baste to swab on during long cooks — keeps the bark from drying. Makes about 2 cups.

Ingredient	Amount
Beef or chicken broth	1 cup
Cider vinegar	1/2 cup
Water	1/2 cup
Worcestershire sauce	2 tbsp
Vegetable oil	2 tbsp
A spoon of your rub	1 tbsp

Warm it, swab it on with a brush or mop every 45 minutes once the bark has set — not before, or you'll wash the rub off.

Simple Carolina-Style Vinegar Sauce

Thin, tangy, cuts right through rich pulled pork. Makes about 2 cups.

Ingredient	Amount
Cider vinegar	1 1/2 cups
Water	1/2 cup
Ketchup	2 tbsp
Brown sugar	1 tbsp
Red pepper flakes	1 tbsp
Salt	1 tsp
Black pepper	1 tsp

Whisk it cold, let it sit an hour for the flakes to bloom. Pour a little over chopped pork and pass the rest at the table.

The Cookout Timing Sheet — Work Backward

The trick to a smooth cookout isn't speed — it's working backward from when you want to eat. Pick your serve time and count back. Resting time is your friend: a brisket that rests an hour is forgiving if the fire ran slow.

Counting back from serve time	Do this
Night before / morning	Trim, rub the big cuts, get them in the fridge
-6 to -12 hrs	Brisket / pork shoulder on (low and slow, plan generous)
-4 to -5 hrs	Ribs on the indirect side
-2 hrs	Light a second chimney if you need to hold heat; start sides that hold
-1 hr	Chicken and sausages on; rest space cleared for the big cuts
-30 to -45 min	Big cuts come off to rest (tented); burgers/dogs go on
-15 min	Toast buns over the coals, warm the sauce, set the table
Serve	Slice rested meat last, so it hits the plate hot

The two rules that save every cookout: start the long cuts earlier than you think (they finish on their own clock, and a rested brisket waits happily), and never slice early — resting is what keeps the juice in the meat instead of on the board.

Quick Reference — When It's Not Going Right

What's happening	First thing to check
Meat burning outside, raw inside	Cooking too direct — move to the indirect zone, lid down
Constant flare-ups	Fat dripping on coals — slide food to the cool side
Bitter, ashy taste	Dirty white smoke — burn smaller, hotter fires; crack the top vent
Fire keeps dying	Top vent too closed, or wet/packed coals — open the bottom intake
Ribs tough, won't bend	Not done yet — give them time, pull at the bend test, not the clock
Brisket "stuck" at 165°F for hours	The stall — it's normal; wait it out or wrap in foil to push through
Chicken skin rubbery	Cooked too low — finish it over the hot zone to crisp the skin

That's the pack. The one habit worth more than any rig you'll ever buy: get a thermometer, build two zones, and let the meat tell you when it's ready. Keep your smoke thin and blue, rest everything before you slice, and work backward from the clock instead of chasing it. When you pull your first brisket that probes like butter and the table goes quiet, I'd love to hear about it — and in a couple of emails I'll tell you how a

quick word from you helps this book reach the next person standing over a cold grill wondering where to start.

Cook the meat, not the clock,

Dale Kettering