

covering them for only the first hour of cooking yielded moist ribs with a thick flavorful crust.

The meat was sweet, savory, and succulent, but it lacked the smoky flavor and aroma essential to great ribs. We tried substituting ground chipotle chiles (smoked jalapeño peppers) for the cayenne pepper in our spice rub, but the smokiness of the chiles mysteriously disappeared among the other flavors. We then thought about adding barbecue sauce for its hickory flavor—a sensitive issue considering how quickly sugar-laden sauce burns. We first tried slathering sauce on after we took the foil off, one hour into cooking, and the sauce blackened and turned bitter. We then tried basting the ribs after three hours of cooking, and they remained wet and gummy when pulled from the oven half an hour later. Splitting the difference proved just right. When applied to the ribs after two hours of cooking (so the sauce cooked for one and a half hours), the sauce darkened but did not burn and reduced to a sticky, satisfying glaze.

The ribs disappeared from the test kitchen within minutes of coming out of the oven, but we were able to save a few and tried wrapping the ribs in foil and sealing them in a paper bag—the trick that had worked so well with our barbecued ribs. As we had expected, the ribs wrapped for an hour were juicier

and more tender than ribs that were not wrapped.

While our oven-roasted ribs may not be quite as rarefied as those from a roadside shack in Kansas City, they are pretty close and infinitely easier than a trip to the Midwest.

## Oven-Roasted Spareribs

SERVES 4

*While the final step of wrapping the ribs in foil and the paper bag may seem eccentric, it is well worth it. We found the meat prepared this way to be extraordinarily succulent and tender.*

- 2 full slabs pork spareribs (about 6 pounds total), trimmed of excess fat
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup Dry Rub for Barbecue (page 126)
- 3 cups barbecue sauce (see pages 127 to 129)

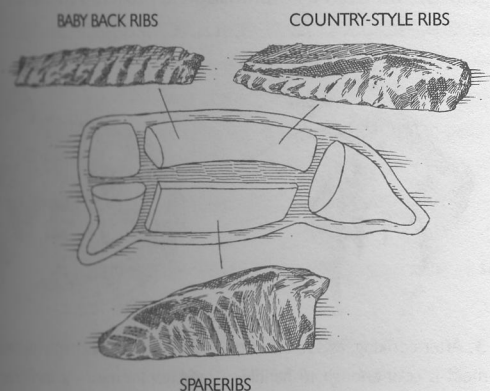
1. Rub both sides of the ribs with the dry rub and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour. (For stronger flavor, wrap the rubbed ribs in a double layer of plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to 1 day.)

2. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 300 degrees. Place the ribs meaty-side up on a heavy rack in a rimmed baking sheet and then wrap the pan with aluminum foil. Cook for 1 hour and then remove the foil. Cook for another hour and then liberally brush the meaty side of the ribs with the barbecue sauce, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup per slab. Cook for another  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours, or until the bones have separated from the meat.

3. Remove the ribs from the oven and completely wrap each slab in foil. Put the foil-wrapped slabs in a brown paper bag and crimp the top of the bag to seal tightly. Allow to rest at room temperature for 1 hour.

4. Unwrap the ribs, cut in between the bones, and serve immediately with more barbecue sauce on the side.

### THREE KINDS OF PORK RIBS



Spareribs come from the underbelly of the pig, or the lower rib cage, and have the most fat, making them the best choice for barbecuing. Baby back ribs (sometimes called back ribs or loin back ribs) come from the loin, or upper front end of the rib cage, where the bones are shorter. Country-style ribs are cut from the upper rear end of the rib cage (closer to the legs). These ribs are quite large and meaty.