Master Ribs (3-2-1 Smoked)

Serves a crowd · Serves 4–6 (2 racks)

Ken's note: TBD

Fall-off-the-bone, sweet, smoky St. Louis ribs with a little bark. The rhythm is 3 hours unwrapped, 2 wrapped, 1 unwrapped with sauce. Choose a rub below, and finish with Sweet & Smoky BBQ Sauce (see Sauces); Carolina Vinegar Sauce and Alabama White Sauce are good alternatives at the table.

Ingredients

- 2 racks St. Louis-style spare ribs
- Yellow mustard, for a binder
- Rub (choose one, below)
- Apple juice and cider vinegar, 50/50, in a spray bottle (optional)
- Fruit wood for smoke (apple or cherry, or a mix with a little hickory)

Sweet rub (for 2 racks)

- 3 Tbsp brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp paprika
- 1 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 Tbsp kosher salt
- 1 Tbsp garlic powder
- 1 Tbsp onion powder
- 2 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp ground mustard
- ½ tsp cayenne

Chili-cumin rub (for 2 racks)

- 3 Tbsp chili powder
- 1 Tbsp garlic salt
- 1 Tbsp ground cumin
- 1 Tbsp dried thyme
- 1½ tsp chipotle powder
- 1 Tbsp brown sugar (optional, for the sweet edge)

For the wrap (per rack)

- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp honey
- 2 Tbsp butter, in pats
- Splash of apple juice or cider

To finish

- About ¾ cup Sweet & Smoky BBQ Sauce, thinned with a little apple juice

Method

1. Trim any loose flap meat and excess fat. Peel the membrane off the bone side (slide a butter knife under an edge and pull with a paper towel). Brush the ribs lightly with mustard, coat both sides with the rub, and let them sit 30–60 minutes while the smoker heats to 225–250°F.
2. **3 hours unwrapped.** Smoke bone-side down and leave them alone for at least 2 hours. After the bark sets, spritz every 45–60 minutes if you like.
3. **2 hours wrapped.** Lay out heavy foil for each rack, scatter on the brown sugar, honey, butter, and apple juice, and set the rack meat-side down. Wrap tightly and return to the smoker 1½–2 hours, until very tender; the rack should bend almost in half when lifted with tongs.
4. **1 hour unwrapped.** Unwrap, set the ribs bone-side down, and brush with sauce. Cook 30–45 minutes, until the sauce tightens and gets sticky and the bark is set but not burnt.
5. Done when a toothpick slides between the bones with almost no resistance, or 195–205°F in the meat. For a little more bite, shorten the wrap (3-1½-½). Rest 10–15 minutes, then slice between the bones. Taste a rib and salt at the end if it needs it.