


# BARBECUE

## GETTING TO THE MEAT OF THE MATTER



**THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO BARBECUE THAN JUST THE EATING. SO RELAX, PULL UP A CHAIR, AND ENJOY BARBECUE SOUTH CAROLINA STYLE.** By Jimmy Jacobs

South Carolinians joke that in a lot of places the word barbecue is a verb that simply describes the act of cooking something, anything, outside. Here in the South, however, it is the distinct process of cooking meat, typically pork, very slowly in an open pit while slathering it with a sauce. Not only does it then become “barbecue,” it becomes a work of art open to widely varied tastes and opinions.

If you tell anybody in South Carolina, for example, that you want barbecue, they’ll most likely have some opinion about the best kind, the best sauce, the best place to get it, or the best way to cook it. It’s just like most things in South Carolina: it’s about tradition and a friendly, healthy sense of rivalry.

There are four types of South Carolina barbecue which all can be traced to the state’s early settlers. The earliest type of barbecue was the product of English and French settlements along the coast—a relatively mild sauce consisting of tomatoes with just a touch of mustard and mayonnaise. Later, townships were formed inland to create a buffer against repeated Indian attacks. Township settlers were largely German who preferred a much stronger mustard-based barbecue.

As Scot-Irish settlers later moved down across the Appalachians from Virginia and North Carolina, they added to barbecue a pre-dilection for vinegar and pepper, a sauce found throughout much of the South Carolina Upcountry. There are, of course, other influences and a range of variations and combinations, but in the northwestern part of the state, you’ll find mostly tomato-based sauces. Mustard-based is found largely in the south-east, and areas along the Georgia border are often ketchup based. Vinegar-based barbecue is typically found in the northeastern areas.

There are far too many barbecue shacks and family restaurants with long and interesting histories to mention here, but the nature of barbecue remains the same wherever you go in South Carolina. For example Brown’s Barbecue in Kingstree, SC. Thomas Brown and his family have been making their unique vinegar-based barbecue for over 18 years. Even before that though, when Brown and his family were still farming, barbecue was a family tradition.

It was something they did occasionally on weekends for family and friends. It was also something Brown looked forward to then as now. “It’s always been a way of living,” Brown said. “I really enjoy doing it and I enjoy the people. Yes, the people themselves are a big part of it. Of course people come in because they like our barbecue, but they also come in just to visit.”

If you ask Brown what goes into his barbecue, besides the vinegar that is, he can be a bit elusive. “Everyone’s different,” he says. “We slow cook in an open pit like everybody else, but it’s the sauce that’s special.” That’s true. Families like the Brown’s add their own special touches to the method of cooking, or to a type of sauce, and the product is something both traditional and unique.

Something you might hear a barbecue aficionado talk about is wood burning versus gas pits. A purist will tell you that the only way to cook is in a wood-burning pit, which generally means staying with the pig all night in a building that can get pretty hot. With gas pits, though, the temperature can be set at the end of the day and then left overnight to cook without supervision.

Regardless of the type of pit you use, good barbecue takes time. And it is because of the amount of time involved in preparation and cooking that many of the smaller barbecue restaurants in South Carolina are only open Thursday through Saturday. But even this adds to the unique personality of South Carolina barbecue.

So go ahead and discover your favorite barbecue treasure. Then you’ll be ready to give your opinion on what’s the best barbecue and where to find it.

