

Ish's Fourth of July Barbecued Ribs

Big, plump, pork spare ribs, parboiled to ensure tenderness, then coated with a rich barbecue sauce and baked slowly in the oven until they reach fall-off-the-bone delicateness. Tiny creamer potatoes, spiced with vegetable seasoning and topped with clarified butter, then open-roasted until crusty brown. And a totally refreshing cucumber, bell pepper, tomato, and onion salad covered with olive oil and balsamic vinaigrette. My ol' buddy Ish Taylor says this is one of those all-American menus that's guaranteed to bring the taste of "The Fourth" home.

5 lbs. lean pork spare ribs
5 Tbsp. Frank Davis Pork Seasoning
2 gallons water to cover ribs
1 cup finely chopped vegetable seasonings
10 whole cloves garlic, peeled
4 cups Hunt's Original Recipe Barbecue Sauce

First, place the slab of ribs on a cutting board on the countertop, remove the silverskin from the back side, and with a sharp knife split the slab into individual ribs. When they've all be sliced, put them into the sink, sprinkle the pork seasoning evenly over them, and toss them thoroughly, making sure that each and every rib is completely and uniformly coated.

In the meantime, bring the two gallons of water to a rapid boil and add to it the finely chopped seasoning vegetables. Then drop in the seasoned ribs and the cloves of garlic, bring the water back to a gentle roll, and parboil the meat and garlic for about 30 minutes (almost to the point of the pork starting to fall off the bones). *Oh, yeah—I also recommend you parboil with the pot lid barely in place so that excess steam can escape.*

When the ribs are done, remove them from the boiling pot with a pair of tongs and place them on a platter to cool. Then pour the barbecue sauce into a large bowl and, one by one, with the tongs, *dip* each rib into the sauce to coat it completely. Quickly, without letting the excess sauce drip off, transfer the ribs immediately to a large baking pan. (*Hint: the dish gets even richer if you also pour a little extra sauce over the ribs once they're in the pan!*).

Ideally, you want to cover the pan with heavy-duty aluminum foil and stash it in the refrigerator for the meat to marinate (preferably overnight). Then when you're ready to eat, put the pan—*still tightly covered*—into a 350 degree oven and bake the ribs for about 30 minutes or until they turn all hot and bubbly.

When they're ready, serve them piping hot alongside a dish of roasted potatoes. A chilled cucumber, tomato, onion, and bell pepper salad, dressed with an olive oil and balsamic vinegar vinaigrette rounds everything out into a true, finger-lickin' holiday favorite.

Chef's Hints:

1. If you prefer to substitute pork finger ribs, baby-backs, or even beef ribs for the spare ribs, go right ahead and do so. And there are no changes to be made in the recipe if you decide to make the switch.
2. Finely chopped vegetable seasonings contain onion, celery, bell pepper, green onions, garlic, and parsley and can be found in the produce section of your supermarket packed in plastic containers.
3. To do the roasted potatoes, boil them until they're done. Then cool them to room temperature, cut them into several small "watermelon-style" slices, and place them into a shallow baking pan. Then drizzle on some clarified butter, sprinkle on some Frank Davis vegetable seasoning, pop them into a 450 degree oven (uncovered), and roast them for about 20-30 minutes or until crusty brown. Garnish with minced parsley, thinly sliced green onions, and a dollop of sour cream.
4. To make the "Cuke Salad," remove the cucumber skin with a potato peeler and cut the cucumber into thin slices. Then cut the onions and bell peppers (green, yellow, and red make a nice presentation) into rings, and slice the tomatoes into small portions. All that's left is to place all the ingredients into a large mixing bowl, drizzle on the olive oil and balsamic vinaigrette, and season with a generous sprinkling of Frank Davis Vegetable Seasoning. *Oh, yeah—make sure all the ingredients are ice cold!*
5. Depending upon the size and shape of the boiling pot, it may take a little more or a little less than 2 gallons of water to cover the ribs. Just make the adjustment accordingly.

6. It is essential that the ribs reach room temperature before dipping them into the barbecue sauce. If they're dunked while the meat is still hot, the sauce won't adhere to flavor the pork as it bakes.
7. If you're a garlic lover, don't forget you can retrieve the softened garlic pods from the boiling stock and serve them as an accompaniment to the ribs.
8. Ish says no barbecue sauce other than Hunt's Original will produce the desired flavor and effect. I didn't believe him and once substituted another brand I happened to have on hand. He was right—I got an entirely different flavor that was no comparison to his recipe. So don't substitute, okay?
9. If you can't allow the ribs to marinate overnight, at least give them about 3 hours of marinating time. It does make a big difference in the final dish.