



# 5 SECRETS

## for the Perfect Brisket

Tried-and-True Methods to Help You Master Smoked Brisket



# 5 Secrets for the Perfect Brisket

Lavern Gingerich

Are you getting ready to smoke your first brisket?

Or trying to figure out how to cook a tender, juicy brisket every time?

I'm going to be honest... Brisket has been a hard one for me to master. In fact, I still have trouble getting the flat to turn out right consistently. That's what motivated me to do an in-depth study on what really makes or breaks the perfect brisket. In this article I'm sharing the secrets I've gathered from research online and conversations with my friends for how to cook a brisket you can be proud of.

**Secret #1: Avoid cheap brisket.** When I asked Meathead from [AmazingRibs.com](http://AmazingRibs.com) what the top mistakes are people make when smoking brisket, he said that buying less than USDA Choice is easily the most common mistake. He went on to explain:

“Unlabeled brisket is probably USDA Select and guaranteed to be tough. Shop for USDA Choice, Certified Angus Beef (which is guaranteed to be Choice or above), USDA Prime, or Wagyu.”

My friend David from [BBQDryRubs.com](http://BBQDryRubs.com) gave this perspective on it:

“A common mistake is people being afraid of cooking briskets and buying bad beef. People think that brisket is the hardest cut to cook and are afraid they will mess it up. They don't want to waste their money so instead of spending \$60 on a 12-pound Prime grade whole packer they end up with a 4-pound Select grade flat. Turning a small Select grade brisket flat into amazing barbecue can be done, but it is like fighting a boxing match with one hand tied behind your back.

“If you can't find, or afford, a Prime grade brisket, buy a Choice grade product. The difference between the beef grades really makes a difference when you are working with brisket.”

I was just reading a discussion in one of the barbecue communities on Facebook and some people said they can't tell a difference between Prime and Choice and some even said they prefer Choice over Prime. It just goes to show that some things come down to personal preference and there is some variation of marbling within the categories and other factors that make the beef more tender from one steer to the next.

My local grocery store carries Certified Angus Beef, which is on the top end of the Choice grade and sometimes comparable to Prime. My recommendation is to buy what you can afford or find locally within the categories listed above. Partial flats are harder to cook without drying them out, so choose a full packer brisket. If you can flex them in the packaging, go for one that feels flexible and has nice marbling.

**Secret #2: Inject it.** A brisket has two muscles, the fatty *point* and the much leaner *flat*, which is easy to dry out. A lot of people recommend injecting a brisket to boost the flavor and to reduce the chances of it drying out. There is a controversy about whether injecting actually helps keep the brisket juicier. If this is a myth, you can know that it does at least help boost the flavor. You can go with a fancy brisket injection or just keep it simple and go with a sodium free beef broth to intensify the beef flavor.

**Secret #3: Wrap it in foil.** After the brisket hits about 160 degrees F or a good bark has formed, tightly wrap your brisket in heavy duty foil and put it back on the smoker. By wrapping, you will sacrifice a little flavor and the bark will soften, but wrapping a brisket shortens the cooking time and, according to some, keeps the meat more tender and juicy.

*What about wrapping in butcher paper?* Butcher paper is the in-thing to use for wrapping right now, but I like Meathead's take on the difference between foil and paper:

"Wrapping in foil makes a moister meat with a hint of pot roast, and a soft bark, but it can cut two hours off the cooking time. Wrapping in paper cuts about an hour off cooking time, lets some moisture escape but traps most of

the rendered fat, and tastes very much like the foil wrapped version. Bottom line, the differences are very subtle. And fears of destroying the bark are overblown. If you have a good bark when you wrap, most of it will survive.”

Malcom Reed from [HowtoBBQRight.com](http://HowtoBBQRight.com) says a common mistake is wrapping it too soon: “If you wait until the bark is formed and the color is a nice, dark, mahogany, you will have a more appetizing final product.”

**Secret #4: Know when it's done.** Aside from buying high quality meat, this is the second most important thing you need to get right.

When I asked my friend John from [Man Cave Meals](http://ManCaveMeals.com) for the top mistakes people make when cooking brisket, he said, “Not cooking it long enough, and not understanding what probe tender feels like which means you don’t know when the brisket is ready to come off.” Under or overcooking a brisket will ruin it faster than about anything else.

Here is John’s method for telling when a brisket is done:

“My brisket technique was perfected when I took Harry Soo’s BBQ class. When my brisket hits an internal temperature of 190 F in the thick part of the flat, I start checking for “probe tenderness” throughout the flat at about 20-minute intervals. Probe tender means that a thermometer probe or skewer will slide into the meat with little to no resistance. Knowing what that feels like is the key to perfecting a brisket cook. The entire flat needs to feel like that (except for the thinner edge that will likely be a little over cooked when the rest of the flat is ready).”

**Secret #5: Hold it until serving time.** The cooking time for a brisket can vary by a few hours, so holding lets you plan extra time in the schedule and keep the brisket hot until it’s time to eat. Most everyone teaches that holding is important for tenderizing the meat or holding the juices inside. For example, Malcom Reed says, “Once you’ve pulled it off the smoker, wrap it and let it hang out in a dry cooler. This will give you a more tender final product.”

I personally tend to think that the main benefit of holding is the flexibility it gives you on the finish time, as John from Man Cave Meals says,

“Once my brisket is probe tender, I remove it from the smoker and rest it unwrapped until the internal temperature of the meat drops to around 185 F. This helps prevent carryover cooking from overcooking my brisket. At that point, I double wrap it in foil and rest it in a cooler covered with a towel for 1–5 hours until I’m ready to serve it.

“If the point is not done completely at this time, I will separate it and either put it back on or make it into burnt ends. My points get done about the same time as my flat because I partially separate them before the cook (a technique I learned from Harry Soo as well).”

## **More Tips for Beginners**

### **Slicing**

Slicing against the grain is important for tenderness and presentation. Check out some common methods for slicing a brisket on Meathead’s Texas Style Brisket page linked below.

### **Speeding up the Cook**

The following technique was written by David from [BBQDryRubs.com](http://BBQDryRubs.com):

“One of the biggest mistakes people make when smoking briskets is cooking at too low of a temperature.

“A brisket must be cooked until it is tender. While that sounds simple, many people give up after 12 hours of smoking at 225 degrees F because they don’t have the time or patience to wait another few hours.

“Another challenge of smoking at low temperatures is that you will need to maintain a clean fire for a long time. That is hard for most folks to do. Folks will add more fuel or adjust a vent and end up running with dirty smoke for 10–15 minutes. Do that a few times over a 12–14 hour cook, and your brisket ends up coated in creosote.

“Adding fuel during a cook is not a problem if you are good with fire management, but most people just starting out haven’t mastered fire management and struggle to maintain a clean fire for 12–14 hours and end up with creosote on their meat. For example, someone lets the fire get too low and tries to compensate by adding a bunch of unlit charcoal at once. They are going to be dealing with billowing white smoke for at least 30 minutes. After a while, all that charcoal gets lit, the temperature spikes and they close their vents to get it under control, which will produce more billowing white smoke.

“You can cook a great brisket at any temperature between 200 and 325 F, but it is much harder to do at 200–250 F. I recommend somewhere between 275 and 300 F because it speeds up the cook to a time frame that most people will have the patience for.”

## **Step-by-Step Instructions for Smoking Brisket**

Here are several links to detailed recipes for cooking a brisket:

### **David Sommerville’s Brisket Course**

<https://www.bbqdryrubs.com/brisket-boot-camp>

### **Meathead’s Texas Style Brisket**

<https://amazingribs.com/tested-recipes/beef-and-bison-recipes/brisket-texas-style-ultimate-technique-and-recipe>

### **Jeff Phillips Brisket Recipes**

<https://www.smoking-meat.com/tag/brisket>

### **Malcom Reed’s Competition Brisket Method on a Yoder Smoker**

<http://howtobbqright.com/blog/?p=1417>

**Browse Meadow Creek’s USA-Made Smokers**



### The Sponsor

Meadow Creek Welding is a family-owned manufacturer of revolutionary smokers and grills in the Amish community of Lancaster county, Pennsylvania. Browse their products at [MeadowCreekBBQ.com](http://MeadowCreekBBQ.com).



### The Publisher

StoryQue helps barbecue enthusiasts master amazing barbecue and helps barbecue brands grow their businesses.

Get a free trial to StoryQue magazine at [StoryQue.com](http://StoryQue.com).

---

Thanks for downloading my brisket secrets guide. If you have any questions, you can reach me at [lavern@storyque.com](mailto:lavern@storyque.com).

Sizzling regards,

*Lavern Gingerich*

StoryQue, editor



## **Revolutionary Smokers and Grills That Make Amazing Barbecue Fun and Easy**

**Hand-crafted in the Amish community of Lancaster County, PA**

**Explore the Catalog**