Basic Master BBQ Sauces

There are infinite versions of sauces to accompany smoked and grilled meats. These recipes are meant to represent just a few of the popular styles. And as master recipes they are intended to serve as solid starting points and not complete finished sauces. There is also a set of master techniques to develop flavor that can improve these and many other recipes. The goal is for you to make these sauces your own. Add fresh and dried spices and aromatics to your preferred tastes. Tweak the ratios of vinegars and sweeteners. Swap out sugar for honey, wine for water, etc. Be creative.

Vinegar-Based Sauce

More sour than sweet and more of a dressing than a sauce. Style is popular in the Carolinas and is meant to really just to compliment and accompany smoked pork rather than smother it. Because of the lower sugar, it can also be mopped on or glazed as meat smokes and grills without the worry of burning. May be made with or without any tomatoes.

Ingredients:

1 cup apple cider vinegar

1/2 cup minced onion

1/3 cup brown sugar

2 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon cayenne powder (or other powdered pepper of your choice)

[Optional] ½-1 ½ cup ketchup or 2-4 tablespoons tomato paste

Steps:

1. Heat oil in saucepan on med-high heat and add cayenne plus any other powdered spices. Stir about 3-4 minutes until toasted and aromatic.
2. Add onion (and any extra oil if needed) and any fresh herbs to saucepan with the toasted spices and sauté until softened and translucent. Stir for 3-4 minutes to be sure there is no scorching.
3. Add all other ingredients and simmer (not boil) 5-10 minutes until just slightly reduced in volume. This is more of a dressing and should not be a thick sauce.
4. May be used immediately, but best to let steep for a few hours or even a day.
5. Will keep in fridge for 1-2 weeks. Freezing is best for long term storage and will not affect flavor or texture. Just blend or stir after it thaws.

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Ketchup/Tomato-Based Sauce

This is the thicker style sauce akin to most store-bought bbq sauces. It is meant to be equal parts sweet and sour. Due to the amount of sugar and risk of burning, this sauce is not good for using except at the end of grilling/smoking. Recipe also makes great fruit-based sauce by simply swapping out the ketchup for equal part pureed fruit. Unsweetend apple sauce makes a great version. (To use fruit jams and jellies, please see *Jam/Jelly-Based Sauce* recipe.)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup apple cider vinegar
- 1/2 cup water or stock
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons ground mustard
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon cayenne powder (or other powdered pepper of your choice)

Steps:

1. Heat oil in saucepan on med-high heat and add cayenne plus any other powdered spices. Stir about 3-4 minutes until toasted and aromatic.
2. Add onion (and any extra oil if needed) and any fresh herbs to saucepan with the toasted spices and sauté until softened and translucent. Stir for 3-4 minutes to be sure there is no scorching.
3. Add all other ingredients and simmer (not boil) 10-15 minutes until thickened.
4. May be used immediately, but best to let steep for a few hours or even a day.
5. Will keep in fridge for 1-2 weeks. Freezing is best for long term storage and will not affect flavor or texture. Just blend or stir after it thaws.

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Mustard-Based Sauce

Very similar to a vinegar-based sauce, but slightly thicker due to the added mustard. This is the standard sauce in the German-settled parts of mid-South Carolina, but is now justifiably popular all over the country. Like vinegar-based sauces, it is meant as just to compliment to the pork rather than smothering sauce. Pretty amazing on grilled vegetables too or even as a cold or hot salad dressing.

Ingredients:

1 cup yellow mustard (good with other mustards too)

2/3 cup apple cider vinegar

3/4 cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon cayenne powder (or other powdered pepper of your choice)

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Steps:

1. Add all ingredients and simmer (not boil) 5-10 minutes until slightly thickened.
2. May be used immediately, but best to let steep for a few hours or even a day.
3. Will keep in fridge for 3-4 weeks. Freezing is best for long term storage and will not affect flavor or texture. Just blend or stir after it thaws.

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Jam/Jelly-Based Sauce

This can be thick or thin, scorching hot or just a little spicy, more sweet or more savory. It is a very flexible sauce that is reminiscent of a traditional Cumberland sauce. The molasses makes it leans towards BBQ sauce, but leave it out and you have a wonderful dressing for everything from pork roast to grilled duck or even Thanksgiving turkey (especially if you use cranberry jelly).

Ingredients:

1 cup jam or jelly

1/2 cup apple cider vinegar

1/2 cup red or white wine (depending on the jam/jelly)

1/2 cup minced onion

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 teaspoons garlic powder

2 teaspoons ground mustard

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon cayenne powder (or other powdered pepper of your choice)

Steps:

6. Heat oil in saucepan on med-high heat and add cayenne plus any other powdered spices. Stir about 3-4 minutes until toasted and aromatic.
7. Add onion (and any extra oil if needed) and any fresh herbs to saucepan with the toasted spices and sauté until softened and translucent. Stir for 3-4 minutes to be sure there is no scorching.
8. Add all other ingredients and simmer (not boil) 10-15 minutes until thickened.
9. May be used immediately, but best to let steep for a few hours or even a day.
10. Will keep in fridge for 1-2 weeks. Freezing is best for long term storage and will not affect flavor or texture. Just blend or stir after it thaws.
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