

BBQ Cook-Day Cheat Sheet

Temperatures tell you when to start checking. Tenderness tells you when it is done. The only figures here that are not negotiable are marked **SAFETY**.

SAFETY USDA minimum internal temperature. Not a preference.

TARGET Pitwright's check-here range. Start probing, do not pull on the number alone.

FEEL Tenderness and texture. This is what actually finishes a cook.

Pit temperature, and why you would run it

PIT	WHAT IT IS FOR	CUTS THAT RUN THERE
225–250°F	The default low and slow. Collagen renders, bark builds.	Brisket, Pulled Pork, Baby Back Ribs, St. Louis Ribs, Pork Belly Burnt Ends, Chuck Roast, Spare Ribs, Smoked Sausage
275–325°F	Poultry. Below this, skin turns rubbery instead of crisp.	Smoked Chicken, Smoked Turkey
225°F → 400°F	Smoke for flavour, then crank it to crisp the skin.	Chicken Wings
275°F	Hot and fast. Renders hard fat without a fourteen-hour day.	Beef Plate Ribs
250°F	A touch faster, still gentle. Suits smaller cuts.	Pork Tenderloin
225°F → sear	Smoke to a target internal, then sear hot for crust.	Tri-Tip
225°F	The slowest setting here. Most smoke contact, longest cook.	Smoked Salmon

Check ranges and finish cues

TARGET

FEEL

CUT	PIT	CHECK AT / FINISH CUE	TIME	REST	WOOD
Brisket	225–250°F	203°F, probe-tender (point ~210°F)	12–18 hrs	2 hr	Post oak
Pulled Pork	225–250°F	205°F, bone pulls clean	10–16 hrs	1.5 hr	Hickory or apple
Baby Back Ribs	225–250°F	Bend test / toothpick-tender (~198°F)	4–5 hrs	15 min	Cherry + hickory
St. Louis Ribs	225–250°F	Toothpick-tender (~203°F)	6–7 hrs	20 min	Hickory or cherry
Smoked Chicken	275–325°F	165°F breast / 175°F thigh	3–4 hrs	15 min	Cherry or pecan
Chicken Wings	225°F → 400°F	175°F, then crisp over high heat	2–2.5 hrs	5 min	Cherry or pecan
Beef Plate Ribs	275°F	202°F, probe-tender	8–10 hrs	45 min	Post oak
Pork Belly Burnt Ends	225–250°F	~200°F, jiggy and tender	8–9 hrs	10 min	Cherry + apple
Chuck Roast	225–250°F	205°F to shred / 200°F to slice	8–12 hrs	1 hr	Oak or hickory
Smoked Turkey	275–325°F	165°F breast / 175°F thigh	4–6 hrs	30 min	Cherry + apple
Pork Tenderloin	250°F	145°F (a little pink is fine)	1.5–2 hrs	10 min	Apple or cherry
Tri-Tip	225°F → sear	125–130°F, then sear hot	2–3 hrs	15 min	Red oak or cherry
Spare Ribs	225–250°F	Toothpick-tender (~203°F)	6–7 hrs	20 min	Hickory or apple
Smoked Sausage	225–250°F	165°F internal	1.5–2 hrs	5 min	Hickory or pecan
Smoked Salmon	225°F	145°F, flakes cleanly	1.5–3 hrs	5 min	Alder or cherry

Times are planning ranges for an average cook on an average day, not a countdown. Weight, pit, weather and the piece of meat itself all move them.

SAFETY

Minimum safe internal temperatures

- 145°F** plus a 3 minute rest · whole cuts of beef and pork
- 160°F** · ground beef and pork, and fresh pork or beef sausage
- 165°F** · all poultry, and chicken or turkey sausage
- 140°F** · the line hot food stays above while it is held for later

Brisket, pork butt, chuck and ribs finish far above their safety minimum because tenderness, not safety, is what you are waiting for. Source: USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Wrap cues

FEEL

Wrapping is a timing decision, not a step. There is no single temperature that means wrap.

- Bark set.** Press an edge with a gloved finger. It does not smear, lift, or leave paste behind. Colour is deep and the surface looks dry, not wet. Brisket and pork butt often reach this around 160 to 175°F, but the surface decides, not the probe.
- Stall established.** The internal temperature has parked, usually somewhere between 150 and 170°F. That is evaporative cooling, not a dying fire. Wrapping shortens it; waiting builds bark.
- Schedule pressure.** Dinner is fixed and the cook is behind. Foil moves fastest and softens the surface most. Butcher paper is the middle path. No wrap gives the firmest bark and needs the most time.

Skip it on chicken, nearly always: a wrap traps moisture against the skin and works directly against crisping it.

Running late

Bark not set	Stay unwrapped if the schedule allows. A wrap over a fragile surface trades the bark for a head start you may not need.
Bark set, behind	Wrap. This is the honest speed-versus-surface tradeoff, and it is the reason the wrap exists. Foil is the faster half of it.
Wrapped, still behind	A moderate pit increase is reasonable now that the bark is protected. Move in steps and keep probing.
Near the finish	Stop chasing the number. Probe for tenderness. A cut pulled tough at the “right” temperature is still tough.

None of these buys a fixed amount of time. How much they help depends on the cut, the pit, and how far behind you already are.

Free Pitwright tools

pitwright.com/tools/

Cook Rescue Mid-cook check. Am I comfortable, on track, tight, or actually late?	Cookout Planner Several cuts, one serving time, one shared timeline.	Brisket Start Time Fire-lighting time, meat-on time, wrap window and rest, planned backward from dinner.
Rest & Hold Calculator Came off early? The rest, the hold method, and where the safety line falls.	Meat Per Person What to actually buy, after trim, bone and cook loss.	Temperature Chart The full, filterable version of page one, on the web.
Rub Calculator Any rub scaled to your weight, salt shown by weight.		

Today’s cook

Fill it in at the pit

FIRE LIT	MEAT ON	WRAPPED AT	PROBE - TENDER	REST STARTED	SERVED
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Write the times down while the fire is still hot. Next cook, the only thing better than a chart is your own last one.

WHEN IN DOUBT Close the lid. Wait 30 minutes. Look again. Almost every cook-day mistake is doing something too early: wrapping, pulling, slicing.

Finished early

SAFETY

Early is the better problem. Finish it properly, then hold it properly: a cut that finishes late cannot be rushed without hurting it.

Holds for hours	Brisket, Pulled Pork, Beef Plate Ribs, Chuck Roast, Smoked Turkey. Wrapped, towelled, into a dry cooler. Honest to about 3 hr; past that use a low oven or warmer so it cannot drift under 140°F.
Does not hold	Baby Back Ribs, St. Louis Ribs, Smoked Chicken, Chicken Wings, Pork Belly Burnt Ends, Pork Tenderloin, Tri-Tip, Spare Ribs, Smoked Sausage, Smoked Salmon. Up to about 1 hr at most. These dry out or overcook on a long hold, so time them to finish near serving instead.
The line	Held hot food stays at or above 140°F . Below it you have 2 hr total, or 1 hr when the air is above 90°F, then it must be reheated to 165°F or thrown out. You cannot hold your way back to safe.

Hold on a probe reading, not on faith. Slice only when you are ready to serve: a whole rested cut keeps its moisture, a sliced one starts drying in minutes.