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## Marge Perry, David Bonom have outdoor smoke party

### Marge Perry makes brisket, ribs

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Often when I cook, I am under deadline and carefully noting timing and measurements, or giving a public demonstration (where tucking a stray bit of hair behind my ear is tantamount to sin), or teaching. I love doing all these things which, for the most part, evolved from my first and foremost culinary love: cooking for friends and family.

I especially enjoy having friends over in the summer, when I can entertain outside. Plants and candles make a perfect setting (and I don't have to worry if the house isn't perfectly clean). Conversation and guest lists tend to be more fluid when the gathering is on our patio, and I use more rustic dishes and serving pieces.

A couple of weeks ago, I invited seven friends (some old, some new) to join us for a "smoke" party, that is, a party featuring foods smoked by my husband, David Bonom. Several years ago for his birthday, some of the guests at this party were among the group that chipped in to buy David an enormous (10-foot-long) handmade smoker from Texas. Our friends have benefited from their generosity - as have we.

For many home cooks, the pleasure of hosting a gathering is greatly diminished by the anxiety and stress of getting it all done, and worrying about the outcome. Here's the cure: planning and philosophical levity.

I'll start with planning, because it makes the levity part a lot easier.

#### Planning the menu

Mix cooking times and methods. Be sure the menu is a balance of dishes that are completely finished ahead of time and those that need just a little attention before they are ready to serve. In this menu, the crisp may be warmed just before serving, but everything else is done before guests arrive.

Even the most extravagantly equipped homes can rarely support an entire menu prepared solely in the oven, on the grill or on the stove. Plan to use a variety of cooking sources. This menu uses the grill, oven and stove top.

Choose at least some do-ahead dishes. Select recipes (such as a fruit crisp) that can be made in advance and reheated, need a minimal amount of, or no, last-minute attention (the Mediterranean barley salad is made ahead of time and served at room temperature), and/or are slow-cooked (such as smoked brisket and pork or, in the winter, a stew or braised dish).

Do everything possible ahead of time. Every little step done before guests arrive helps. For example, when grilling burgers, form and season the patties in advance. Making rice? Put the salted, measured water in the pot and have the rice measured in a little bowl. These actions add up and de-clutter both your kitchen and your brain for when guests arrive.

#### Getting ready

**Shopping.** Almost any party with some preparation completed in advance will require two shopping trips - one big one a week ahead, and then a small "last-minute" trip (day of or day before the party) for the most perishable produce and seafood. As soon as the menu is planned, make the two lists.

**Serving.** The day before the party, get out every platter, bowl and utensil you will need, and use sticky note paper to mark what food will be served in each piece.

**Lighting.** Lighting is key to setting the mood, so if it is an evening party outdoors, plan on plenty of candles or lanterns. Check ahead of time that you have enough candles or lamp oil - or whatever it takes to cast an appropriate amount of light.

#### Philosophical levity

Remember that you, too, are supposed to have fun at your party. If something goes awry - for example, your crisp isn't thick enough - then work around it or have a sense of humor about the problem. Spoon the crisp into wine glasses, top with ice cream and call it a fruit-crisp parfait. And if something goes terribly wrong, then announce it to your guests, as in "The meat is still raw, and if we wait for it to cook, it will be another three hours, so we have a change in menu. This is now a pizza party!" and order in. Because, remember, despite how seriously we cooks can take ourselves, the gathering is also about spending time with friends - it's not all about the food.

#### TIP

For a short-cut method to get smoked flavor, try the Savu Smoker Bag, a three-layer foil bag with a layer of wood chips. It can be ordered on line at [bigacres.com](http://bigacres.com)

#### RECIPES

##### SMOKED BRISKET

You needn't have a monster smoker like ours to get this woodsy, earthy flavor. The method below can be used on any charcoal grill.

Approximately 6 cups of fruitwood chips

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons DB's spice blend (see recipe)

5- to 6-pound beef brisket

1. Soak the fruitwood in warm water for 20 minutes.

2. Press the spice blend onto both sides of the brisket.

3. Set up the grill for indirect heat using about 7 pounds of charcoal placed on 1 side of the grill. Let the coals get to the white-ash stage, then top with about half of the wood chips. Sear brisket directly over the coals for 1 to 2 minutes on each side then move to the indirect heat and close the grill. The temperature should range from 350 to 400 degrees. After 45 minutes, add more coals and about half of the remaining wood chips; turn brisket over. Cover and grill 1 hour longer; again add more coals and the remaining wood chips. Continue cooking until brisket is tender, about 1 1/2 hours longer. Transfer to a cutting board and let stand 10 minutes before slicing. Makes 10 to 12 servings.

(Note: Brisket can lose as much as a third of its volume as it cooks.)

#### DB'S SPICE BLEND

We make a big batch of this spice blend and keep it in an air-tight container. This recipe will make a bit more than you need for the brisket and the ribs.

6 tablespoons ground cumin

6 tablespoons garlic powder

6 tablespoons packed light-brown sugar

6 tablespoons paprika

2 tablespoons salt

1 tablespoon dry mustard

1 tablespoon ground thyme

1 tablespoon cayenne pepper

1 tablespoon allspice

Combine all ingredients. Makes about 2 cups.

#### DRY-RUBBED SMOKED SPARERIBS

If you are serving both brisket and ribs, put them on the grill together (as long as the grill surface is large enough to hold both).

Approximately 6 cups fruitwood chips

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons DB's spice blend (see recipe)

2 racks pork spareribs, about 10 pounds

1. Soak the fruitwood in warm water for about 20 minutes.

2. Press the spice blend onto both sides of the ribs.

3. Set up the grill for indirect heat using about 7 pounds of charcoal placed on 1 side of the grill. Let the coals get to the white-ash stage and then top with about half the wood chips. Sear ribs directly over the coals for 1 to 2 minutes on each side then move to the indirect heat and close the grill. The temperature should range from 350 to 400 degrees. After 45 minutes, add more coals and about half the remaining wood chips; turn ribs over. Cover and grill 1 hour

longer; again add more coals and the remaining wood chips. Continue cooking until ribs are tender, about 1 1/2 hours longer. Transfer to a cutting board and let stand 10 minutes before slicing into individual ribs. Makes 10 to 12 servings.

#### DAVID'S HOMEMADE BBQ SAUCE

To give your sauce smoky flavor, place this cooked sauce created by my husband into a heavy-duty foil pan on the grill for 30 to 60 minutes.

1 (28-ounce) can tomato puree

6 tablespoons packed light-brown sugar

4 tablespoons cider vinegar

3 tablespoons molasses

3 tablespoons tomato paste

2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

1 tablespoon dry mustard

1 teaspoon chili powder

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon cayenne

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring the mixture to a simmer and cook until thickened,

20 to 25 minutes. Makes approximately

2 cups.

#### MEDITERRANEAN BARLEY SALAD

You can substitute other grains, such as orzo or couscous.

2 cups quick-cooking barley

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

6 plum tomatoes, chopped

4 scallions, chopped

1 teaspoon dried oregano

3/4 cup pitted Kalamata olives, coarsely chopped

1 cucumber, chopped into 1/2-inch pieces

1 1/2 cups crumbled feta cheese

1. Cook barley according to package directions.

2. Combine the olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add the chopped tomatoes, scallions, oregano, olives, cucumber, feta and cooked barley. May be served warm or at room temperature. Makes 12 servings.

## GRILLED VEGETABLES WITH SUMAC

Sumac is a lemony purple-red spice used in Middle Eastern cooking and, until recently, was available only at specialty markets. The slightly sour, astringent ground berry is now bottled by some of the major spice companies and can be found in many supermarkets alongside other dried herbs and spices.

1 pound eggplant, cut into 12 ( 1/4-inch-thick) slices

1 pound zucchini, cut lengthwise into 1/4-inch-thick slices

2 red bell peppers, cut vertically into 4 equal pieces each

2 green bell peppers, cut vertically into 4 equal pieces each

2 Vidalia or other sweet onions, cut into 1/4-inch-thick slices

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

1/2 teaspoon ground sumac

1. Prepare the grill for direct-heat grilling.

2. Brush the eggplant, zucchini, bell peppers and onions with oil, then sprinkle with salt and pepper. Add the vegetables to the grill and cook the eggplant, onions slices and bell peppers 5 to 6 minutes on each side, or until tender and well marked. Grill the zucchini slices 4 minutes on each side. Cool the bell peppers for about 5 minutes, then cut into strips.

3. Arrange vegetables on a serving platter, then sprinkle with the sumac. Makes 12 servings.

Marge Perry's column will return next week.

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