

# Prime Rib Roast

By John Clarke

Is there anything more festive, impressive and luxurious than a big juicy beef roast? It's easy to prepare on your grill or in your oven as well.

As you may recall from earlier articles, I use a Big Green Egg, which is a kamado style (ceramic) charcoal grill. It retains heat extremely well, and you are able to control the temperature. If you do not have one, the Weber kettle grill and your gas grill are also good options, but make sure you invest in a good thermometer to monitor both the grill surface temperature and the doneness of your cook.

I prefer beef to be medium rare, which is an internal temperature of 130-135 degrees. The meat is a nice, full red color without purple colorations and not yet turning pink. I want a small section of gray just below the crust and a full juicy red color from there to the center rather than a rainbow of colors from gray just below the crust to pink to red in the center.

We want a lot of deep dark crunchy crust enriched by salt, herbs and spices, mixing with beef juices that are squeezed out by heat and dried to a bark by the roasting process. A crusty outside makes for a good-tasting prime rib.

If you do not want a mess when you start the carving at the table, you can begin by removing the bones or ask your butcher to prepare a cut without the bones. The absence of bones clearly will make the roast much easier to carve, but if you prefer the bones, then leave them in.

**Getting started.** If you are inclined for the capital outlay, buy a prime rib, but others will work fine. Overall, rib roasts are the most tender, juicy, flavorful, and expensive, especially when you factor in the considerable waste from trimming. Strip loin is close behind, a chuck eye roast can be darn close and a lot cheaper, and top sirloin butt can be superb and cheaper still. Tenderloin is slightly more tender, but not as juicy and flavorful. I will focus here on the prime rib, but the method works the same for other cuts.

We ask the butcher to cut off the bones if we buy prime rib or strip loin. The rib bones cover almost 1/3 of the surface of a rib roast, reducing the amount of crust significantly, and everybody loves crust. And contrary to myth, bones do not add flavor to a roast. If you are at all concerned with what to buy, just ask the butcher for the most marbled prime rib or rib roast available, and get that one.

As noted earlier, you will need a good thermometer, such as a digital instant read one. You can also use one that you stick in the meat and leave it in. Remember an important lesson: you cook with a thermometer and not a clock—so you do need to be vigilant since the internal temperature can go from a nice 130 degrees to 140 (or higher) in a matter of minutes. Thermometers that come with your grill have been reported to be off by over 50 degrees—so it pays to have a good one.

Preparation is the key, and you will want to dry brine the meat. Do this step at least a day ahead of your cooking by liberally coating the exterior in salt. Juices will come out of the meat and melt the salt, pull it into the meat and, over a couple of days, pull it deep into the center. The salt enhances the ability of the meat to hang onto moisture during cooking and really “beefs” up the flavor and keeps it moist.

Cinch up your roast to get it as round as possible by pushing in on each end as the flat ends of a roast will cook too fast and dry out. Use a sharp knife to cut off the fat cap and remove most of the surface fat. A number of people don't like prime rib because of all the fat. I know fat is flavor, but the fat we want is within

the muscle, not on top of it. Muscle is mostly water, and fat and water just don't mix. Some of the fat just melts off, but most of it remains on top of the meat. Your guests will trim it off when you serve it and they will not get to taste the crust you have nurtured. Important point: we want the seasoning on the meat, not on the fat.

If you do choose a roast with bones and have the butcher cut them off for you, save them so that you can place them in a pan beneath the meat while it is cooking. Between the bones and the drippings, you will get some quality liquid to use later to baste the meat. This “gravy” will not have flour or a thickening agent but just the drippings flavored with the marrow from the bones and the seasonings from the meat. When you are ready on your cook day, coat the meat with your favorite rub and go straight to the grill. You do not need to let it sit out and come to room temperature.

In an earlier article, I introduced the reverse sear technique that is taking over the BBQ circuit. You will want a two-zone setup so that one part of your grill is cooler than the other. Choose your wood, and add it to the fire to give the meat a touch of smoky flavor. Cooking slowly will allow the interior of this thick piece of meat to heat slowly and evenly. No matter how much heat you apply to the outside of a roast, it takes time for heat to move from the air into the outer layer of the meat and then from the outer layer down to the center. Patience and preparation are the keys. Searing at the beginning of your cook often will lead to more gray-colored meat than that good-looking medium rare you are shooting for. And keep that meat above the roasting pan (whether you have bones or not) and not in the roasting pan. We want to capture the juices for use later.

**Cooking time.** In order to reach medium rare, 130 to 135°F, in the deepest part of a boneless roast, get the grill temperature at the level of the meat to 225 to 250°F. Estimate about 30 minutes per inch in diameter (plus 20 minutes to sear at the end of the cook) and about 5 minutes on each of the four sides. That means a four-inch thick roast should take about two hours of indirect cooking, plus about 20 minutes of searing over direct heat—but check it with a thermometer to be sure where you are.

When the internal temperature of the meat is about 115 to 120 degrees, you are ready to start the searing process on each part of the meat. Open all the vents and get your grill hot. Move the meat around to sear on all sides. You can leave it in place over the hot part of the grill for 5-10 minutes before turning, but be vigilant. Check your internal temperature after a few turns and remove once you are between 130 and 135.

If for some reason you are not reaching optimal temperature in the best time frame for you (maybe it was too cold out or you had an issue with the charcoal or gas), you can bring it inside to the oven. Use the broiler setting for searing.

Once at your temperature choice, it is not necessary to rest the meat. If you do, it can continue to cook. You won't lose any juices if you capture them and pour them over the meat. A lot will be reabsorbed.

There are lots of recipes if you want to make the gravy thicker, but try a thin gravy with just the drippings (or you can add some onions, carrots and celery to the drip pan to get even more flavor). Leftover gravy has all sorts of uses, too, so keep in mind to save it for later if you have leftovers.

A quick online search will yield a satisfactory recipe for horseradish sauce, or you can blend mayonnaise and prepared horseradish found in the cooler section of the grocery store. Blend until you achieve the taste you like, and salt and pepper as desired. Adding a tablespoon or so of ranch dressing is also a good taste treat.

Enjoy your prime rib.

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