

# Prime Rib Roast

By John Clarke

Is there anything more festive, impressive and luxurious than a big juicy beef roast? Well it's easy to make out on the grill, and it definitely tastes better—but you can also cook indoors if you prefer.

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 also allows for temperature control. If you do not have one, the Weber kettle grill is a good standby, but make sure you invest in a good thermometer to monitor both the grill surface temperature and to test the doneness of your food.

Let's talk a bit about what done looks like in the form of the cook temperature. I shoot for medium-rare, which is 130-135 degrees. About 1/4 inch from the crust, the meat is a nice full red color without purple colorations and not yet turning pink. We do not want a rainbow of colors from gray just below the crust to pink to red in the center, but instead a small section of gray, then a full juicy red color from there to the center.

The goal is a 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 as well. If you want an easier time carving at the table, you can begin by removing the bones or ask your butcher to prepare a cut without the bones. The roast will clearly be much easier to carve without bones, 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 a close second, a chuck eye roast can also be 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. In this article I will focus on the prime rib, but the method works the same for other cuts.

I ask the butcher to cut off the bones if buying 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. 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 that he has 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 in. An important reminder: you cook with a thermometer and not a clock so you do need to be vigilant. In a matter of minutes your internal temperature can go from a nice 130 degrees to 140 or higher. Thermometers that come with your grill have been tested and often have been reported to be off by over 50 degrees. It is essential to have an accurate thermometer.

If you did have a roast with bones and 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. With 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.

Next, cinch up your roast to get it as round as possible, as the flat ends of a roast will cook too fast and dry out. You can make it as round as possible by pushing in on each end to get a round shape. Use a sharp knife to cut off the fat cap and remove most of the surface fat. Yes, I know fat is flavor, but the fat we want is *within the muscle*, not on top of it. Important point: we want the seasoning on the meat, not on the fat.

Preparation is the key, and you will want to dry brine the meat. Do this step a day ahead of your cooking by liberally coating the exterior with salt. Juices will come out of the meat and melt the salt and pull it deep into the meat over a couple of days. The salt enables the meat to hang onto moisture during cooking and

enhances the flavor. 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. 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. 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. No matter how much heat you apply to the outside of a roast, it takes time for it to move 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 trying to achieve. And keep that meat above the roasting pan and not in the roasting pan. We want to capture the juices for use later and, of course, the bones, if you have them, should be in the drip pan as well.

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

When you get to about 115 to 120 degrees internal temperature, 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 the temperature after a few turns and remove once the internal temperature reaches between 130 and 135 degrees.

If you are not able to finish off the roast on the grill (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.

**Resting.** In this case, 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.

**About the gravy.** There are many recipes if you want to make it 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 that in mind and save it for later if you have leftovers.

Try this recipe for horseradish sauce to serve with your perfectly cooked prime rib:

1/4 cup sour cream (or make it all mayonnaise)  
2 tablespoons prepared horseradish in vinegar  
1 tablespoon mayonnaise  
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt  
2 pinches ground white pepper

If too thick for your taste, cut with a very small amount of milk (a teaspoon or two). If you choose, you can make a simple sauce with mayonnaise and horseradish found in the cooler section of the grocery store. Blend together until you achieve the taste you like the best. Salt and pepper as desired. Adding a tablespoon or so of ranch dressing also adds an interesting flavor.

Enjoy your prime rib.

**Tip for chicken wings.** Chicken wings are always a staple on Super Bowl day, which is just around the corner on February 5. Try this tip to make your wings really crispy: steam them for 10 minutes and then let them rest in the fridge for at least 30 minutes or overnight. You can then cook them however you like, but what you are going to find is that the skin crisps up very nicely and they will be superb, with your guests asking for more. I tried this tip with some turkey wings recently and then fried them. They were delicious with very crispy skins.