

## Shortcut Pastrami (*Katz's, Abbreviated*)

**Makes.** About 3 pounds of pastrami after shrinkage, enough for 4 good sandwiches after trimming

**Cooking time.** For the steamed version, it takes about 6 hours to smoke a thick 4 pound chunk at 225°F. Actual cooking time depends on thickness not weight. Then it goes into the fridge about 12 hours, and then it steams for about 2 hours. Larger and thicker cuts will take longer. For the Texas version, forget the refrigeration and steaming, but add 2 hours to the 6 hours in order to reach final temperature.

### Ingredients

- 4 pounds of good corned beef, preferably home made (see below for recipe)
- 4 tablespoons fresh coarsely ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons coriander powder
- 1 teaspoon mustard powder
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- ~~2 tablespoons cooking oil~~ (this is why the rub won't adhere well)

**About store bought corned beef.** *Our sample is brined. Brined corned beef is usually a hunk of brisket that has been cured in a salt (and nitrite) solution and packaged in a hearty cryovac plastic bag with some of the brine. It has not been cooked yet.*

**About the rub.** *The paprika mostly adds color. If you want to veer from the conventional and amp it up a bit, substitute ancho powder or American chili powder, but be careful, the black pepper and mustard supply an ample kick. You can leave anything out that you want except the black pepper and the coriander.*

### Method

- **Partially remove the fat cap**, leaving about 1/8". If there is any filmy membrane on the other side, remove it all. That thin layer of fat is important. The process usually takes about a week. We will push it to a day and a half or two days.
- **Desalinate.** Put the corned beef in a pot slightly larger than the meat and cover it with cold water in the fridge for 4 to 8 hours, at least 4 hours. Change water once, preferably twice.
- **Rub.** Make the rub by blending together all the spices. Rinse the meat and place it on a large piece of aluminum foil. While it is damp, apply the rub liberally, about 4 tablespoons per square foot of surface, and press it into the surface to help it adhere. If there is a thin part of meat, use less rub. Put in the fridge for preferably 2 days, but at least a couple of hours. Wrap in foil, enough to save and use later. Normally you do not need to let meats marinate in a rub, but the wait seems to help this particular rub adhere.
- **Smoke.** Set up your grill in 2 zones for smoking or set up your smoker. If you can, use a charcoal smoker. It produces a deeper darker crust than any other cooker. Preheat to ~~225°~~ 250°F. Type of wood doesn't much matter.

Smoke it with indirect heat until it reaches the stall at about 150°F. At this point, you can wrap in foil and refrigerate for a week if you wish, or continue cooking in the smoker, or proceed to the steaming step.

- **Cook further**

- **Texas way:** keep on cooking. You can avoid steaming by wrapping the meat in foil while cooking to 195 degrees F. Then unwrap it and finish by cooking to 203 or so degF. Internal Meat Temperature.
- **Steam.** If you have a bamboo or metal steamer in which the meat will fit, you can use that. If not, you can make a steamer by putting a wire rack in a baking pan. If necessary you can sit the rack on wads of foil to keep it out of the water. Unwrap the meat and put it on the foil in which it was wrapped or the steam will wash off much of the rub. Do not slice the meat first.

If you made a steamer with a baking pan, cover it with foil. If the pan is steel don't let the foil touch the meat. The salt, the water, the steel, and the aluminum can interact and create electrical charges that can melt the foil! This is a phenomenon called the "lasagna cell" because it happens to lasagna often.

Put the pan on a burner, turn the heat to medium low, and steam it an hour or two until heated through to 203°F. Add hot water as needed, making sure the pan never dries out. Don't rush this.

- **Cook to Internal Meat Temperature of 203°F.**

- **Steaming:** The crust tends to get soft when you steam. No doubt about it, a hard crust is more appealing. So you can firm the crust by putting it on a hot grill or in the oven or under the broiler for a few minutes. The best crust comes from the full smoke.

The big puzzlement is how does Katz's retain the hard crust even though they boil the meat just before serving. Dr. Blonder speculates that they pack the meat in so tight that the crust remains hard. I'm skeptical.

- **Texas style:** This way, the whole process can be completed in your smoker, if you are observant.

- **Slicing.** Slicing is crucial to maximize tenderness. Look at the meat and notice which way the grain is running. Cut it by hand in thin slices, about 1/8" thick, perpendicular to the grain. If you cut parallel to the grain it will be much chewier. Don't try to slice it with a machine. It will just fall apart.

- **Serve.** I serve it nekkid on fresh untoasted rye bread. A good brown mustard on both slices and a few shreds of sauerkraut is nice but not necessary.

Now this is going to sound weird: It may need a light sprinkling of salt. The soaking process occasionally removes too much. So taste it and if you wish, sprinkle it on lightly.

If you want, you can make a rockin' pastrami Reuben with sauerkraut, melted Swiss, and thousand island dressing. Reubens were originally made with corned beef, but there's no rule that you can't make one from pastrami. In fact, I highly recommend it.