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Blue Ribbon Barbecue Ribs

4 servings

I call these ribs "Blue Ribbon" because the wrapping technique and the addition of the sugar, honey, and apple juice have won many a blue ribbon on the barbecue cook-off circuit. My old buddy Bill Milroy from Denton, Texas, who's been cooking in these contests since the 1970s, tells me he's the guy who first tried this, and I believe him. At least a few hundred of us are doing it nowadays, so I guess it was a good idea! Wrapping ribs in aluminum foil gets them tender, but it also keeps the ribs from getting dry and it hurries the cooking time a little. I think the sugar, honey, and apple juice just make them taste better and many a barbecue judge agrees with me. These would go very well served with baked beans and potato salad.

2 slabs St. Louis-style ribs or baby back ribs
3/4 cup Rib Rub #99 (see below)
1/4 cup Sugar In The Raw
1/2 cup honey
Cayenne pepper, as needed
2/3 cup apple juice
2 cups your favorite barbecue sauce

1. At least a half hour and up to 4 hours before you plan to cook the ribs, peel the membrane off the back of the ribs and trim any excess fat. In a small bowl, combine the Rib Rub and the sugar. Season the ribs liberally on both sides with the rub mixture. Refrigerate.
2. Prepare the grill for cooking over indirect heat at 300 degrees F using apple or cherry wood for flavor. Place the ribs directly on the cooking grate, meaty side up. Cook for 1 hour. Flip and cook for another 30 minutes. Flip again and cook until they are nicely caramelized and golden brown, about another 30 minutes but may vary depending on your grill. Transfer to a platter.
3. Lay out two big double-layered sheets of heavy-duty aluminum foil, each long enough to wrap a whole slab of the ribs. Transfer the ribs to the foil, meaty side up. Drizzle half of the honey on each slab. Dust each slab with cayenne pepper. Fold the foil up around the ribs into a packet. Before sealing add half of the apple juice to the bottom of each packet. Seal the packets snugly, being careful not to puncture the foil with the rib bones. Return to the grill for 45 minutes to 1 hour to reach your desired degree of tenderness. The best way to determine the doneness is to open the foil after 45 minutes and feel the texture of the meat. It should be very tender.

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4. Transfer the foil packets to a platter. Raise the temp of the grill to 400 degrees F. Remove the ribs from the foil and return to the cooking grate. Divide the barbecue sauce equally between two bowls, one for brushing on the ribs as they grill and one for serving at the table. Brush the ribs with the sauce and flip. Brush the other side and cook for 5 minutes. Flip again, brush, and cook for 5 minutes. Discard the sauce that you've been brushing with. Remove the ribs to a platter. Serve 1/2 slab to each guest with the second bowl of sauce on the side.

Rib Rub #99

Makes about 1-1/2 cup

3/4 cup Sugar In The Raw
1/2 cup salt
1/4 cup paprika
2 tablespoons finely ground black pepper
1 tablespoon granulated garlic
1 tablespoon onion powder
1 tablespoon ground cumin
1 tablespoon chili powder
1 teaspoon dry mustard
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/2 teaspoon ground allspice

Combine all ingredients, mix well, and store in an airtight container.