

LOCAL

HOG WILD

KICK OFF BACKYARD GRILLING SEASON WITH LITTLE MISS BBQ'S SCOTT AND BEKKE HOLMES.



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“PORK RIBS ARE ONE OF MY GREATEST childhood food memories,” says pitmaster and restaurateur Scott Holmes. “My mom would braise them in the oven, and then my dad would sauce them up and grill them. We didn’t make ribs that often, but when we did, it was a real treat.”

These days, Scott and his wife, Bekke, can have ribs every day of the week, if they so choose. As the owners of Phoenix’s renowned Little Miss BBQ—consistently rated one of the top barbecue joints in the country—the couple has been serving up tasty Central Texas-style meats that rival dishes found in the South, where the cooking technique originated.

The pair, who met in 2006, spent about four-and-a-half years on the competition barbecue circuit, where they honed their flavor profiles and garnered a loyal following before opening their first brick-and-mortar establishment in February 2014. Set along an industrial stretch of East University Drive in South Phoenix and open only for lunch hours, the takeout spot became a favorite of local office workers. A 4.5-star review in the Arizona Republic catapulted it to the top of the state’s “must-try” experiences, and soon hungry diners from all corners of the Southwest and across the country were lining up for some genuine Sonoran ’cue. In November 2018, the Holmeses opened

Scott and Bekke Holmes’

Top 5 Barbecue Tips

1 Don’t go too low and slow. “Everyone thinks that you need to cook barbecue at 200 degrees, and that the lower they go, the better off the meat is going to be,” says Scott. “I always recommend cooking barbecue at 250-275 degrees. It’s going to take less time, it’s going to look better, and it’s not going to dry out as much. It just ends up being a superior product.”

2 Understand how meat cooks. According to Scott, if the end product is dry and tough, it’s undercooked. If it’s dry and crumbly, it’s overcooked. “Some people think it’s overcooked when it’s tough, but it’s just the opposite,” he says. Understanding the texture of the meat will allow you to make adjustments in grilling time and technique.

To make Little Miss BBQ's pork spare ribs at home, check out Scott and Bekke's recipe at phgmag.com/sonoran-scout.

up a second outlet in Sunnyslope, complete with a dining room, beverage service and evening hours.

In addition to their award-winning brisket, pork ribs are a staple of the eateries' daily menu. Scott and Bekke start with the biggest and best racks possible. "We use full spares because they're meatier," Scott notes. Full spares include the portion of the sternum where the rib cage meets the underside of the hog, resulting in longer ribs.

Most barbecue restaurants, especially nationwide chains, use baby back ribs, which come off the side of the pig and, according to Scott, are more difficult to cook because one end is thick while the other tapers down. "The problem with baby backs is that by the time the larger end is tender, the other one will be dry and stringy," he explains. For the home griller, Scott recommends using St. Louis-style ribs, which can be found at most groceries and butcher shops. This cut resembles baby backs in size, but the curved bottom edge of the rack, known as the rib tips, has been removed. "Some people don't like rib tips (because they contain the strip of cartilage), but I do. When they're cooked well, they're delicious," Scott adds.

Before they're grilled, the ribs are seasoned with a blend of salt, paprika, garlic, onion, celery salt and cayenne. "It's super simple," Scott says. "A touch of sugar helps caramelize the meat and gives it a really nice color. Then we finish everything off with some very coarse black pepper."

While Phoenix historically has not been known as a barbecue destination, "we're trying to make it one," Bekke remarks. "There's just something about ribs that feels very American. You have them on the Fourth of July, during picnics or for celebrations. You're sitting outside, surrounded by friends and family, and you get to use your hands to eat. Ribs are messy, they're sticky—and they're just delicious."

For more information, see Sources.

OPPOSITE Scott Holmes has been dishing up some of the Valley's best-tasting pork ribs since 2014.

BELOW Scott suggests slicing between the rib bones in a single stroke—using a long, sharp knife—to avoid crushing or tearing the meat. Serve as is or with a bottle of your favorite sauce.



3 Use enough seasoning. "Scott's mantra is 'salt enough, salt enough, salt enough,'" says Bekke with a laugh. "Salting just brings out the meat's natural flavor." Apply a thin coating of seasonings on both the top and bottom side of your ribs, steaks or burgers prior to grilling. This allows the flavors to penetrate into the meat during cooking. However, don't go overboard. You can always layer on more salt or even cayenne if needed.

4 Watch the color. With ribs, you want the exterior of the meat to be a nice shade of mahogany, Bekke explains. Once it reaches that color, wrap it in either aluminum foil or butcher paper and continue to cook it until it is done. "Wrapping the meat helps keep it tender and juicy," she adds.

5 Use smoke sparingly. "If your barbecue tastes like lighter fluid, it's oversmoked," Scott points out. If you're using charcoal or wood, wait until the billowy dark gray smoke burns off and you're left with mostly just the heat in the air. Adds Bekke, "When the flame coming off of the grill is lightly tinged blue, that's when you want to start cooking, because it's going to add a slight flavor without being overpowering."