

Spicing Up Sauces for the Grill

Tired of the same ketchup-y barbecue sauces, we looked for more exciting flavors—and made an unconventional stop at the candy-making department.

⇒ BY KEITH DRESSER ⇐

A trip down the condiment aisle of any supermarket is bound to turn up a dizzying array of tomato-based barbecue sauces, most of which are carbon copies of one another—terribly sweet and not the least bit interesting. The only thing they manage to get right? They stick to the food like gangbusters. That tackiness was something I wanted to preserve as I set out to create a handful of homemade grilling sauces to enliven chicken and pork. What I wanted to ditch were those tired, saccharine flavors in favor of something that tasted more balanced and exciting.

To get my bearings, I tried a few recipes. Most were so thin and runny that they slid right off the meat, and those that were sufficiently gooey relied on gobs of flavor-dulling flour or cornstarch.

The ingredient labels of bottled barbecue sauces didn't offer any useful clues either. Manufacturers build viscosity in their products by adding a glut of chemically fabricated emulsifiers—not a route I was about to take. Instead, I brainstormed for alternatives to ketchup or tomato sauce that would lend viscosity, stickiness, and an ability to serve as a foundation for a variety of flavorful add-ins. I came up with an unconventional idea: caramel. Super-adhesive and plenty thick, melted sugar seemed ideal. And it couldn't have been simpler to make: It took all of five minutes to caramelize $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of sugar until it turned golden-amber and its one-note sweetness deepened into something richer. At this point, I added a few placeholder sauce ingredients. The sauce thickened up as it cooled, and the caramel produced enough tackiness to keep it glued to the meat during cooking.

Now came the fun part: deciding what other ingredients to add. I wanted each sauce to have a balance of sweet-tangy flavors and maybe a spicy kick. Hoisin and pineapple juice, apple butter and whole-grain mustard, orange marmalade and orange juice, and coconut milk spiced with red curry paste created pairings with a tempered sweetness that worked nicely against the caramel. For brightness, I worked an acidic component into each sauce—clean-tasting cider and white vinegar in some, and a healthy splash of rice vinegar or tart lime juice in the Asian-inspired versions. Finally, I whisked in bold elements: Chipotle chiles,

red pepper flakes, dry mustard, and Chinese five-spice powder added punch, while fish sauce and soy sauce built a salty dimension.

My sauces might take a few minutes longer to make than twisting open a cap, but they're far more complex than anything from a bottle.

APPLE-MUSTARD GRILLING SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup apple cider or apple juice
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup apple butter
- 3 tablespoons whole-grain mustard
- 1 teaspoon dry mustard
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon table salt
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar

1. Whisk cider, apple butter, whole-grain and dry mustards, vinegar, salt, and cayenne in medium bowl.

2. Place water in heavy-bottomed 2-quart saucepan; pour sugar in center of pan, taking care not to let sugar crystals adhere to sides of pan. Cover and bring mixture to boil over high heat; once boiling, uncover and continue to boil until syrup is thick and straw-colored, 3 to 4 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and continue to cook until syrup is golden amber, 1 to 2 minutes longer. Quickly remove saucepan from heat and whisk in apple-mustard mixture. Return to medium heat and cook, whisking constantly, until caramel has dissolved and sauce has thickened, about 2 minutes. Transfer $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sauce to medium bowl to use for grilling. Set aside remaining sauce for serving.

HOISIN GRILLING SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hoisin sauce
- 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 3 tablespoons pineapple juice
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Pinch Chinese five-spice powder
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar

Whisk hoisin, rice vinegar, pineapple juice, soy sauce, ginger, red pepper flakes, and five-spice

powder in medium bowl. Follow recipe for Apple-Mustard Grilling Sauce from step 2.

ORANGE-CHIPOTLE GRILLING SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup orange marmalade
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup juice plus $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon finely grated zest from 1 orange
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar
- 1 chipotle chile in adobo, minced (about 1 tablespoon)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon table salt
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar

Whisk marmalade, orange juice, zest, vinegar, chipotle, and salt in medium bowl. Follow recipe for Apple-Mustard Grilling Sauce from step 2.

COCONUT-RED CURRY GRILLING SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups coconut milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup juice and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon finely grated zest from 2 limes
- 1 tablespoon red curry paste
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup sugar

Whisk coconut milk, lime juice, zest, curry paste, and fish sauce in medium bowl. Follow recipe for Apple-Mustard Grilling Sauce from step 2, increasing final sauce thickening time to 6 to 7 minutes.

How to Use Them

Our grilling sauces work equally well on pork or chicken and yield enough to coat 6 to 8 pieces (3 to 4 pounds) of meat, plus extra for the table. Wait to apply until the last five minutes of grilling (the meat should be about five degrees below the desired final internal temperature). Brush one side of the meat with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sauce reserved for cooking, then flip it and cook until browned, about two minutes. Brush the second side with another $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sauce reserved for cooking, then flip it and cook until browned on the second side, two to three minutes. Serve, passing the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sauce separately.

Caramel for Grilling? See Why.

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