



FIRED UP

Chef Javier BardaUIL prepares a wood fire (often hickory or applewood) for cooking at his restaurant Barda.

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PHOTOS: MARVIN SHAOUNI

Take a cue from these chefs to kick your grilling game up a notch this summer.

COOKING OVER AN open fire is an art that must be mastered with time and patience. There is no formula that can tell a chef just when a piece of meat is done cooking.

But for two Detroit chefs who are experts at harnessing fire to get maximum flavor in their dishes, there are some tips and tricks to get it right.

"You need time to be able to cook like this," says Javier BardaUIL, the chef and owner at Barda in Detroit's Core City neighborhood. "It takes time to understand how to manage the fire and to build your instincts. The first few times, you won't be happy with the results. But you have to keep practicing. It's a learning process."

BardaUIL has been making barbecue the Argentine way long before he arrived in Detroit in 2019.

"In Argentina, barbecue is a way of life," says BardaUIL, who was born in Buenos Aires and cooked all over the world before receiving "a special offer" in 2019 to open a restaurant in Detroit, picking up and moving his family to Michigan. "We cook pretty much everything over an open flame. It's a ritual for us and a strong part of our culture."

Like many Argentines, BardaUIL often hosted day-long barbecue affairs before he immigrated to the United States. These events often begin at noon with smaller barbecued dishes of sausage, cheeses and sweetbreads, while the main attraction—a large piece of meat—cooks for hours over an open fire. When the main dish is ready, guests enjoy the lightly seasoned and brined meat with salads and glasses of wine. Guests who are still visiting around the fire late into the night enjoy leftovers from earlier in the day as well as wine. The evening

often culminates with the host ordering a large delivery of ice cream.

BardaUIL developed his approach to barbecue—one that guests can experience at his restaurant's open, live-fire kitchen—as he studied native cooking techniques. For those wanting to re-create an Argentine barbecue with a large piece of meat such as a full rack of beef ribs, multiple stages of fire, as well as multiple hours will be required.

Just as Argentines have been doing for centuries, BardaUIL harnesses fire at different stages to bring out all the flavors of his meats and vegetables. The first stage is low in heat and heavy on smoke as the newly lit fire begins to burn. Ideal

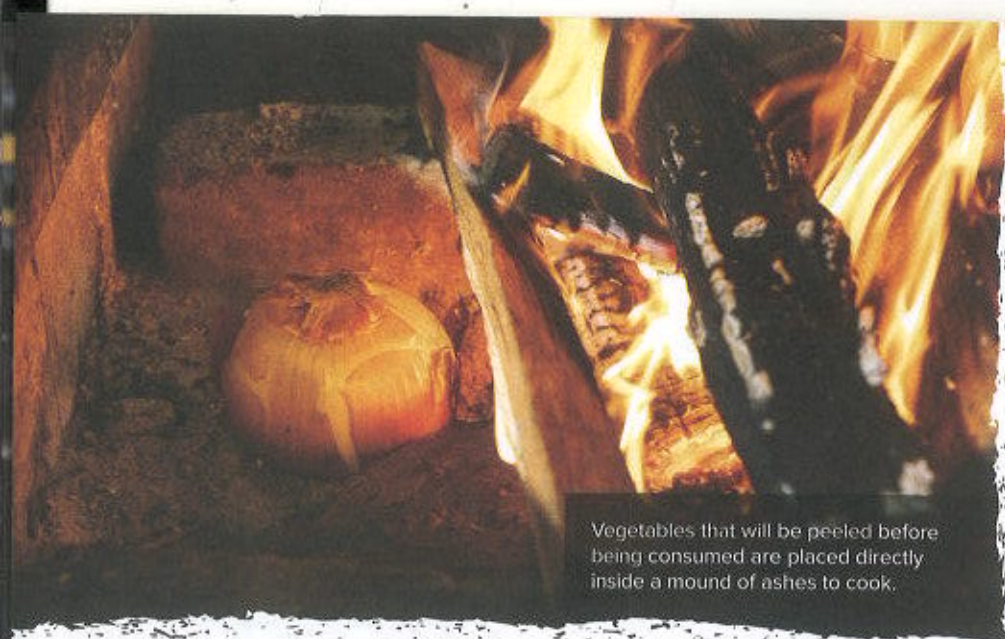
foods for smoking are fish, bacon and fattier cuts of meat.

BardaUIL uses both charcoal and wood to barbecue. His woods of choice are hickory and applewood, which impart unique flavors. It's important to select both a soft wood and a hard wood that work together to keep the fire going.

After the smoke subsides and the fire becomes established, the other stages of fire that BardaUIL makes use of is both direct and indirect heat. Cooking directly over an open flame is ideal for thin cuts of meat that can be done in less than 30 minutes. At this stage, foods can be charred, causing their amino acids to become sugar—caramelizing the outside,



Choice cuts of meat grilled on an open flame are often the main attraction at traditional Argentinian day-long parties.



Vegetables that will be peeled before being consumed are placed directly inside a mound of ashes to cook.

creating another layer of flavor and producing the grill marks that are the hallmark of barbecue.

Indirect heat is the right choice for thicker, tougher cuts of meat, which breaks down strong muscle fibers, taking at least several hours to cook.

To use indirect heat the Argentine way, remove the fire and create a crown shape with the embers, then cook the

meat over the crown. As an alternative, many American home grillers relegate the fire to one side of the grill while using the indirect heat on the opposite side of the grill to cook, with the lid usually closed.

Heat control is key to successful barbecue.

"It's important not to cook your meats too fast or too slow," says Andy Hollyday, chef and owner at Selden Standard. "Beginners need to pay attention and be engaged when cooking over an open fire. The grill needs to be attended to constantly."

At the Midtown neighborhood restaurant, Hollyday also makes use of open-fire cooking, while still incorporating more of the marinades and rubs that Americans are accustomed to using. Selden Standard, which serves seasonal new American cuisine, employs wood-fired cooking to impart flavors to its food and highlight its seasonal ingredients.

"The smokiness of the fire elevates our food with an additional layer of flavor," says Hollyday.

When it comes to vegetables, BardaUIL uses the ashes from the fire to cook a variety of produce such as peppers, onions and potatoes. This method is ideal for any food that will be peeled before being consumed, as the vegetables are placed directly inside a mound of the ashes.

The fuel itself is BardaUIL's major source of seasoning. Like most Argentines, he eschews marinades, rubs and sauces. Instead, he relies on simple ingredients like oil, salt, pepper, lemon and sometimes rosemary.

In addition to the smoke, the dishes at Selden Standard are flavored with simple ingredients like olive oil, salt, herbs, vinegars, fruit juices, honey and sugar. The ingredients that go into Hollyday's rubs, brines, marinades and cures are all designed to bring flavor to both the inside and outside of the meat.

Rubs are dry mixtures containing salt and other dried herbs and spices. Cures are very similar to rubs and contain sugar in addition to the other ingredients. They are best used on larger cuts of meat that don't require additional moisture, such as beef brisket and pork shoulder. The lack of moisture creates a crispy layer both on top of and under the skin. Rubs and brines should be applied at least one day prior to cooking.

Brines work much faster than rubs or cures because they use liquid, which distributes the flavors more evenly among the pieces of meat. Depending on the type of meat, brining may take anywhere from 30 minutes to 24 hours.

When it comes to marinades, Hollyday applies these mixtures of herbs and liquid bases first to the raw meat and then again near the end of cooking. This approach results in a caramelized, more intense flavor. Typical bases for marinades include soy sauce, vinegar, miso, tomato sauce and olive oil. Bottled Italian salad dressing often functions as a simple beginner's marinade, although Hollyday recommends homemade marinades.

Meat is often the focus of marinades, but Hollyday also uses these mixtures to flavor vegetables. He often makes his own vinaigrette with fresh herbs to enhance vegetable kabobs made with eggplants, onions and peppers. One of his favorite ways to cook vegetables is in the ashes, just as BardaUIL recommends.

For both chefs, their guiding principle for barbecue is "Less is more."

"Work with good ingredients," Hollyday says. "Keep it simple, use seasonal ingredients and listen to your instincts. You don't need much to make a tasty meal."

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GAUCHO SHORT RIBS WITH CHIMICHURRI

FROM CHEF JAVIER BARDAUIL

YIELD: 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

For the Chimichurri

- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
- ¾ cup finely chopped fresh oregano
- 8 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1½ teaspoons crushed red chile flakes
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- Freshly ground black pepper

METHOD

Dissolve salt in the boiling water and set aside to cool in a small bowl.

Add parsley, oregano, garlic, chile flakes, olive oil, vinegar and black pepper.

Stir in the saltwater brine, then let the chimichurri sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes and up to 3 hours.

Use the chimichurri immediately, or transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 3 weeks.

Short Rib Plate

- 8 pounds natural hardwood
- 1 fire starter
- 1 short rib plate, about 6 pounds

Brine

- 1 cup boiling water
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 garlic clove
- 1 rosemary branch

METHOD

Put everything in a jar and shake it until the salt is dissolved.

Use a bunch of rosemary as a brush to baste the meat with the brine.

Make a fire using charcoal and the starter until all the charcoal is red and



hot; spread them around the edges of the grill leaving the center empty.

Place the rib plate on the grill, bones side down (6–8 inches high from the floor) and cook on indirect heat for about 2 hours, brushing the meat with the brine every 30 minutes.

After 2 hours, the bones should be golden brown and caramelized. Turn the

rib plate over and cook for another hour. Keep constant heat by arranging the coals under the meat as needed.

Once the meat reaches an internal temperature of 160°F, take the plate off the grill and let it rest for 20 minutes, then transfer to a cutting board and cut in between bones.

Add chimichurri on top and serve.

Chill After Grill

As meat comes up in temperature, the muscle fibers begin to tense up. If you cut into it right away, those tense muscle fibers will actually push out the flavorful juices that reside in the meat. By resting the meat, those fibers have a chance to relax reducing the loss of liquid, which prevents meat from drying out!

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