

# East Carolina Kiss & Vinegar Barbecue Sauce & Mop

*"In my mind I'm going to Carolina. Can't you see the sunshine, can't you just feel the moonshine?" James Taylor*

**By Meathead Goldwyn**

Ribs and pulled pork are rich, and the best way to balance and cut the silky fatty mouthfeel is with acid. Along the coasts of North and South Carolina, "East" Carolina or the "Low Country", where barbecue probably began in the US, the locals figured this out a long time ago. They developed a simple vinegar based sauce, probably the oldest BBQ sauce in the nation, to cut through, cleanse the palate, and enhance the flavor. The original was probably just a kiss of hot peppers and vinegar, and some pitmasters use only those two ingredients to this day.

Low Country vinegar sauce is used on naked meat, without a rub, and it does double duty as both a baste (a.k.a. mop) and a sauce. A mop is brushed on the meat while it cooks to cool it and flavor it. Because it is so thin, it penetrates deep.

For people like me who love vinegar and a bit of heat, this simple sauce is all you need on a properly smoked shoulder or whole hog (in the eastern part of NC, whole hog is the cut of choice). Many of you will find it a bit severe and will want to use it as a mop in place of a rub, finishing the with a thicker, sweeter, **more conventional Kansas City style sauce**.

Best of all, this stuff keeps for month in the fridge, so make a gallon.

## Recipe

**Yield.** Makes about 1 1/2 cups. [Click here to calculate how much you need and for tips on saucing strategies.](#)

**Preparation time.** About 30 minutes.

**Keeps.** Because it has a high acid content, it can keep for months in the refrigerator.

## Ingredients

1 1/2 cups of distilled vinegar

1 teaspoon hot sauce

2 tablespoons sugar (white, light brown, or dark brown)

1 tablespoon salt

2 teaspoons crushed red pepper

— 2 tablespoons sugar (white, light brown, or dark brown),

1 tablespoon salt

2 teaspoons crushed red pepper

2 teaspoons finely ground black pepper

**About the vinegar.** *Seems to me that the best sauces in the area were made with distilled white vinegar, not cider vinegar. So I tried my recipe with both and I liked the distilled better. If you want to use cider, feel free.*

**About the hot stuff.** *Use the hot sauce of your choice. Texas Pete is big in North Carolina. I usually use Tabasco's Chipotle. And if you want something more interesting than crushed red peppers, get crushed chipotles. You can even make your own by smoking jalapeños split lengthwise until they are dried.*

**Optional.** *Some folks like to add warm melted butter to this recipe for richness. Butter also helps release fat soluble flavors in the peppers. Up to a stick would be fine. Do it just before serving, and warm the sauce first so the butter doesn't harden.*

## Method

- 1) Pour all the ingredients into a jar and shake. Let it sit for at least 12 hours to allow the flavors to meld. A week is better.
- 2) You can use it as a mop when you cook, you can use it as a finishing sauce when you serve the meat, or both. In the Carolinas it is usually used as both a mop and a finishing sauce.
- 3) To use it as both a mop and finishing sauce, warm it, pour a few ounces into a cup and paint it on the meat with a basting brush once every hour or so while it is cooking. If you use it as a mop, the sauce in the cup can get contaminated with uncooked meat juices on the brush. That's why you don't want to dip the brush in the whole bottle. Discard contaminated mop and serve untouched sauce at the table.