

Startin the Fire
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Do most teams make their own sauces and rubs?

A stroll around any KCBS contest with the question, “Do you make your own sauces and rubs?” will probably get as many answers as there are teams present. Some folks are purist and feel that sauces and rubs MUST be home made. Many pit masters have been very successful in concocting rubs and sauces, so much so that they have turned them into products that are now commercially available to the masses. Some of these products that have been created have become very popular and are used in some form by some very successful teams across the country.

One consensus that seems to be contest wide is that seasonings and rubs have the best flavor and get the highest scores when they are fresh. Most folks that dabble with making rubs privately and commercially agree on this point, fresh ground products have the most flavor. If you decide to make your own, my advice would be to use the freshest ingredients available. Mix only what you know you are going to use and do not hold completed batches for too long before use. In other words, keep it fresh.

Other teams use products that are available in supermarkets across the country while still others search the internet and obscure retailers looking for a specific flavor profile or taste in hopes of getting the judges attention and high numbers. Sometimes they are successful, sometimes not. There are many different and assorted products available that can satisfy even the most discerning palate.

The majority of teams, (by my humble estimate, as I have no scientific study to rely on), use the combination method. This is done by taking a commercially available product to use as a base, and then adding other ingredients to get the flavor where you want it to be. Some teams may even use a mixture of two or three different rubs or sauces on a particular entry in order to achieve the desired taste. Many teams have been very successful using the method.

If you elect to employ the combination method, my advice here would be to be sure to record the amounts of additional ingredients that you have added in order to achieve some type of consistency. It is a good idea to have a baseline to work from on your sauces and rubs. Changes to the profile can be made as needed, just be sure to make a written note, as these facts sometimes have a way of fleeing the area after the contest when you are back home trying to remember what you did or didn't do.

It is also a good idea, and perfectly legal, for you to mix all of your rubs, sauces, marinates, brines, injections and mops while at home. **Remember, while you can prepare these mixes, you CAN NOT season, apply rub, inject, or marinate any meat**

product prior to the on site meat inspection at the contest. The atmosphere in your home kitchen is much more controlled. Completing the mixing step before arriving at the event will save you a good deal of time and make your on site preparation flow much more easily. It is, however, a good idea to include the necessary ingredients, vessels and implements to recreate your mixes into your contest supplies. This is done in case of an unfortunate catastrophe like you or your teammate dropping a large container of your fresh made secret sauce onto the grass before you have had a chance to use it, believe me, it can happen.

By keeping your ingredients fresh, measuring and recording your methods and procedures as well as preparing in advance, you should be able to maintain a desired degree of consistency with your product as well as helping to enhance your overall results and contest experience.