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The 300RMB barbecue battle

Victoria Brownlee arbitrates a Shanghai barbecue showdown, as CHI-Q's Bina Yu and Brian Tock of Tock's Deli show you how to get the most out of your grill this summer without breaking the bank

Food

The challenge

To turn 300RMB into a brilliant barbecue for four people. It's a no-holds-barred fight, with zero rules about ingredients or equipment, as long as everything can be found in Shanghai and comes in within the budget. Each contestant is allowed items from their pantry as long as they're on the list below, everything else has to come from their 300RMB budget.

Permitted pantry items

- Salt and pepper
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Butter
- Mayonnaise
- Chili sauce
- Tabasco
- Soy sauce
- BBQ sauce
- Worcestershire sauce
- Mustard powder
- Chopped spicy peppers
- Garlic powder
- Lemon juice

Bina Yu's menu

- Barbecued pork rib-eye and Iberico pork baby back ribs, served Korean-style ('ssam', or as Yu calls them, 'Korean-style tacos') using wrapping lettuce, pickled cucumber or kimchi, meat, Ssamjang sauce and vegetables
- Barbecued seasonal vegetables – including zucchini, bamboo, enoki mushrooms and spring onions
- Barbecued mackerel with a soy and radish dipping sauce.
- Warm brown mushroom and watercress salad with lemon dressing
- Instant kimchi
- Grilled mango spicy noodle salad

Shopping list

- Meat – 155RMB**
- 2 x pork rib eye, 59RMB
 - 1 x pork baby back ribs, 68RMB
 - Mackerel (1 x whole fish or 2 x fillets), 28RMB

Vegetables and fruit – 143RMB

- Lettuce

- 4 x asparagus sprig
- 2 x bamboo
- Handful of enoki and brown mushrooms
- 4 x green chili
- 4 x lemon
- 1 x cucumber
- 1 x zucchini
- 2 x red onion
- Coriander
- 1 x mango
- Bunch spring onion
- 1 x red cabbage
- 1 x blood orange
- 2 x mangosteen
- Ssamjang sauce (11.90RMB at Ole' or make at home using fermented bean paste, chili, onion, garlic, honey, sesame seeds and sesame oil)

Total spend 298RMB

Where to shop

Yu shopped for her fish and meat at Nicholson's butcher (92 Wuyuan Lu) opting for pork over beef to 'keep costs down'. She got her veggies from her local fruit and veg shop, which she found to be both cheap and fresh. She had trouble finding a variety of herbs in her local store, but could easily pick up coriander.



Preparation

The majority of Yu's cooking happens at the grill itself, and preparation time is mostly spent getting the vegetables ready. The mushroom and mango noodle salad are part-prepared beforehand, and then finished off at the grill.

First prep the meat:

- Fillet the fish
- Slow braise the pork baby back rib for 1.5 hours in stock

Next for the veggies:

- Cook noodles, run under cold water and set aside
- Wash and chop veggies and red onion
- Chop watercress and place in separate bowl
- Remove mango cheeks and set aside
- Make lemon dressing for the mushroom and watercress salad using lemon zest and flesh, green chili, salt and olive oil
 - Make a soy and radish dipping sauce for the fish
 - Make instant kimchi using chopped cabbage, spring onion, chili, sesame oil, sugar, vinegar and fish sauce

Cooking times

A lot of cooking at Korean barbecues is based on personal preference, so cooking times are less precise. The vegetables can all be cooked to your preferred crunch, and can be eaten on the raw side, as can beef. However, make sure you grill the pork until it's fully cooked through, adding Korean rock salt and pepper when it's put on the grill.

As the pork baby back ribs are pre-braised, heat until warm, then add a spicy barbecue sauce (Yu uses CHI-Q's spicy chicken wing sauce with over 20 ingredients; it's sadly a house secret but a store-bought version should suffice).

Grill the mango and add to the noodles with red onion, coriander and chili sauce dressing to create a dish 'inspired by a mango salsa verde'.

Grill the mushrooms and add to the watercress salad with the lemon and chili dressing. Cook the fish roughly five minutes or to preferred taste.

Cooking methods

Yu cooks on a traditional Korean barbecue using charcoal, which she says makes the ingredients more flavourful. Cooking on a high heat and regularly turning the ingredients creates even cooking. By pre-braising the pork ribs, the meat will be beautifully tender. A lot of the finishing touches happen at the barbecue itself, including adding the grilled mango and mushrooms to the salads. Cook the fish last, partly due to the smell, but also because the fish doesn't require the same level of heat as the meat.

For a list of the city's best public barbecue sites, see our great outdoors feature on page 19.

Brian Tock's menu

- Barbecued corn and asparagus
- Smashed barbecued potatoes
- Beef and pork burgers
- Barbecued (smoked optional) chicken thighs

Shopping list

Meat – 206.50RMB

- 0.75 kg ground beef, 102RMB
- 0.25 kg ground pork, 14.5RMB
- 12 boneless chicken thighs, 90RMB

Vegetables – 82.50RMB

- 12 ears of corn on the cob, 46RMB
- 1 kg asparagus, 24RMB
- 1 kg baby potatoes, 6RMB
- 1 onion, 3.5RMB
- Garlic, 1RMB
- 2 eggs, 2RMB

Total spend 289RMB

Where to shop

Tock shops for veggies at his local wet market (believing that 'building guanxi with your veggie people is important to get good prices and their better quality produce'). For meat, you can find him heading to an import supermarket such as Ole' or City Shop, because in his words, meat is 'better safe than cheap'.

Preparation

Tock's barbecue involves a bit of initial preparation and the liberal use of a few pantry ingredients to get things going.

First prep the meat:

- Create a dry rub for the chicken thighs using salt, pepper, chili and garlic. Marinate for 3-6 hours.
- Create a wet marinade for the chicken thighs using ingredients like soy, Worcestershire sauce, barbecue sauce, lemon juice and chopped garlic. Mix and match ingredients in your pantry to preferred taste.
- Combine 75 percent ground beef and 25 percent ground pork, as well as salt, pepper, chopped garlic, chopped onion, garlic powder, eggs and bread crumbs. Mix ingredients together and make patties.

Next for the veggies:

- Make a spicy mayonnaise (including chili sauce, Tabasco, Worcestershire sauce, mustard powder, chopped spicy peppers and mayonnaise), slather all over the corn and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Wrap in aluminium foil and then set aside.
- Mix one tablespoon of both extra virgin olive oil

and butter together and coat the asparagus and split the sprigs evenly into four portions. Wrap in aluminium foil and set aside.

- Boil potatoes to around 80 percent softness then smash them. Coat with olive oil, salt, pepper and garlic powder. Bake for at least an hour at 375 degrees Fahrenheit, then wrap in an aluminium foil bag.

Cooking times

Chicken thighs: sear on high heat for two minutes and then cook on indirect heat for 30 minutes or until white juices run through. Burgers: sear each side on direct heat for two minutes and then move to indirect heat for roughly 15 minutes. Turn after 5-7 minutes. Barbecued corn: 15 minutes (direct heat).

Barbecued asparagus: 8-12 minutes turning once (direct heat). Smashed barbecued potatoes: move to the barbecue for 20-30 minutes, turning the bag every 5 minutes or so (direct heat).

Cooking methods

Before you get cooking, make sure you know how to best use your barbecue. Tock advises to set up your barbecue so one half is turned to mid/high and the other half is turned off. You want to do this firstly to regulate heat in the barbecue cavity, and secondly to cook the meat low and slow. Even burgers taste better when you take your time with them.

Sear the meat at a high temperature and lock in the juices, then move it to the indirect heat side and let your barbecue do the magic for you. When cooking with indirect heat it's important to keep the lid closed and maintain proper heat. So if cooking veggies and meat together, start the meat, move it to indirect heat and around 8-10 minutes before you are done with the meat – throw the veggies onto the high side, turn them after 4-5 minutes and then all items should be ready at the same time. Let the meat stand for 3-5 minutes after it's ready so the juices spread evenly, and make sure the meat is cooked.



Food