

Want a better Passover brisket? You need to know your cuts

By Elizabeth Karmel

Though most of my brisket experience has been spent at the smoker or the grill, I have fond memories of braised brisket, which I usually enjoyed during Passover with my relatives. I remember the beefy steam escaping into the kitchen as the tomato- and onion-flecked meat was spooned onto a serving dish. Sadly, the taste of the brisket was always a bit of a letdown. Which is why I started smoking my briskets; it was an easy way to add lots of flavor. But recently I decided there must be a way to add flavor to a traditional braised brisket.

But first, a brisket primer. A whole brisket averages 15 pounds, and butchers cut it in half to make it easier to sell and easier to cook. The first cut - the lower half of the brisket - is the lean piece, also called the flat. It's the cut most often found at grocers. But because it's so lean, it generally has little flavor.

The second cut sits on top of the flat. Called the point, this cut is fattier and far more flavorful. Most butchers end up grinding the point for burger meat,

mistakenly (at least in my mind) assuming people won't want a fattier cut. But I certainly do! And you should, too. And don't worry about the fat, much of it melts away from the meat during cooking and is easily separated from the pan sauce later.

So if you want an amazing holiday brisket, ask for the point or second cut. If you don't have a butcher in your neighborhood who can provide this for you, you can order the point from any number of online retailers, including Master Purveyors (one of the largest sellers of meat in the country). Trust me... The flavor difference is worth the trouble.

Now that you know what meat to get, let's talk cooking. My secret for getting the best flavor is to make this recipe the day before I serve it. It is very hands-off, but needs patience and time to make it right. That includes letting it set overnight in the refrigerator. This step is important for many reasons, including that it makes it easy to remove the fat. Though the recipe is written for an oven braise, if you have a slow cooker with a saute setting, it's easy to do it in that. Eight hours on high in the slow cooker is perfect.



TWO-DAY BRAISED POINT BRISKET

Ingredients

Start to finish: 40 minutes active plus 4 to 6 hours cooking and overnight chilling

Servings: 10

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper

4- to 5-pound point or second-cut brisket

Olive oil

2 medium red onions, cut into rings

18 1/2-ounce can French onion Soup

14 1/2-ounce can stewed tomatoes

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, plus extra to garnish

1 cup (about 1 ounce) dried porcini mushrooms

4 large carrots, cut into chunks

Chopped fresh parsley, to serve

Flaked sea salt

Preparation

Heat the oven to 325 F. In a small bowl, stir together the salt, garlic powder and pepper. Set aside. If necessary, trim excess fat off the brisket, but leave about 1/4 inch on both sides. Brush any exposed meat (where there is no fat) with olive oil, then season all over with the spice mixture. Heat a large Dutch oven over medium-high. Add the brisket and sear all sides, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer the brisket to a plate.

Arrange the onions evenly over the bottom of the Dutch oven, then set the brisket over them. Add the onion soup, tomatoes, thyme, mushrooms and carrots. Stir gently to

combine, then cover and roast in the oven for 4 to 6 hours, or until the brisket is tender, but not falling apart. Remove the pot from the oven and let the brisket cool in the pot.

Once cooled, cover and refrigerate overnight. The next day, skim off and discard the congealed layer of fat. Remove the brisket and set aside. Place the pot over medium-high heat and the stovetop and bring to a simmer. Cook, uncovered, until reduced to 6 cups. Working in batches, transfer the liquid and vegetables to a blender and puree until smooth. Return to the pot. Slice the brisket into 1/4-inch slices against the grain and place the slices into the reduced juices to warm. Simmer for 4 to 5 minutes. Serve the slices with the juices and topped with parsley and flaked salt.