

WINING + DINING

# Georgia Barbecue

However you spell it,  
Georgia barbecue is Y-U-M-M-Y!

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Barbecue. Bar-B-Que. Barbeque. BBQ. Bar-B-Q. Folks throughout Georgia may not agree on how to spell it, but one thing is for certain: Georgians love slow-roasted meat slathered with sauce.

Don't take that to mean there's some statewide universal recipe: There are as many different interpretations of barbecue throughout Georgia as there are spellings of it. "Barbecue has got to be the most regional food in the world," says Larry Sconyers, of Sconyers Bar-B-Que in Augusta. "Every 50 miles it changes. In the Augusta area alone you can find different types of barbecue sauce: vinegar-based, tomato-based, mustard-based and sauces that are kind of a blended mixture of these."

What most barbecue shares in common is a smoke-infusing wood-burning cooking method. "The cooking process defines barbecue," says Wiley McCrary, proprietor of Wiley's Championship BBQ in Savannah. "You cook on indirect heat and you cook it long—a period of 10 to 14 hours. It's the sauce and the wood that you cook with that generally denote the region."

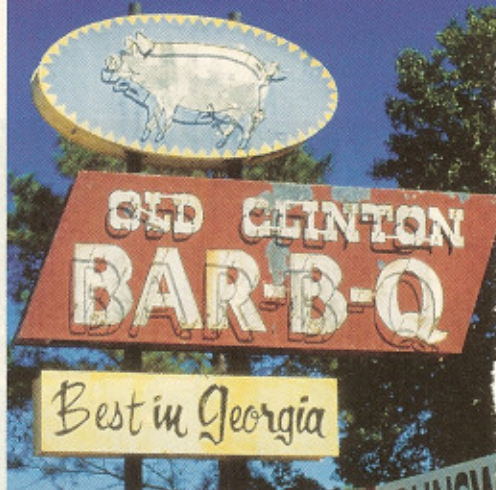
"Most Georgia barbecue uses oak and hickory wood," says Sconyers, who uses this combination at his own restaurant.

At Wiley's Championship BBQ, it's pecan wood and a slight touch of hickory. "In the center of the state they often use peach wood—because we have a lot of peach trees in Georgia," says McCrary. "In Texas they commonly use mesquite wood. The wood has a definite influence on how the meat is going to turn out."

The emphasis on pork is another thing that distinguishes Georgia barbecue from that found in other states. Though chicken, turkey and beef can be found on barbecue menus throughout the state, pork reigns as most popular—whether it's pulled, chopped or sliced, served on its own, or atop a bun.

Georgians' love affair with barbecue has endured for generations: For example, Sprayberry's Barbecue in Newnan has been family-owned and -operated since 1926. Old Clinton Bar-B-Q in Gray and Milledgeville opened in 1958. Fincher's Bar-B-Q in Macon was established in 1935. What's more, barbecue fans can be devout: While he was in office, President Jimmy Carter had his favorite dishes from Sconyers (which opened in 1956) shipped to the White House.

Three things differentiate good barbecue from the not so good: Appearance, taste and tenderness. And contrary to what



some might think, 'tender' doesn't mean the meat falls off the bone. "Absolutely not!" says McCrary at the mere suggestion of such horrors. "A rib should still have a little tug and firmness when you bite into it. If the meat is falling off the bone, it's overcooked and would be marked down in competition cooking."

The key is to cook the meat "low and slow," says Sconyers. That means "a low temperature for a long period of time. We think meat tastes much better if you do it that way. Think of it as 'good food fast': We get it to the table fast, but what we serve on Thursday we started cooking on Wednesday morning. It takes that long."

To add signature tang to barbecue meat, sauce is used as a marinade, basting liquid and/or condiment. While different styles of barbecue sauce can be found in Georgia, tomato-based sauce is most common. "We use tomato-based sauce in our restaurant, which is very popular—in fact, we bought a mustard-based sauce when we first opened and still have three-quarters of the gallon," says McCrary.

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Old Clinton BBQ in Milledgeville (top left) has been voted "Best in Georgia" since 1958. Country's BBQ in Columbus (this page and bottom left) is located in a former Greyhound bus station.

What's most popular served alongside barbecue varies by region as well. For example, hash dominates menus in Augusta, while in Savannah it's Brunswick stew. Typical sides include onion rings (showcasing Georgia's own Vidalia onions, of course!), hot boiled or roasted peanuts, fried green tomatoes, fried pickles, onion rings, coleslaw, baked beans, potato salad, french fries (using sweet potatoes, if you're lucky), green beans, fried okra, sweet corn (often served on the cob), Texas toast, fried mushroom, and macaroni and cheese.

Even folks who own celebrated barbecue restaurants sometimes wonder where to eat barbecue while traveling. "What I try to do is find out which ones the locals like," says Sconyers. "Also, though it's just my personal preference, I try to find a local establishment that's not a chain."

Ask 10 Georgians to name their favorite barbecue restaurant and, odds are, you'll get 10 different answers. (Very passionate answers, in most cases.) Finding your own personal favorite is sure to be a lip-smacking, fun investigation.

#### **Sconyers Bar-B-Que:**

2250 Sconyers Way,  
Augusta, 706-790-5411,  
[www.sconyersbar-b-que.com](http://www.sconyersbar-b-que.com)

#### **Sprayberry's Barbecue:**

229 Jackson St.,  
Newnan, 770-253-4421,  
[www.sprayberrysbbq.com](http://www.sprayberrysbbq.com)

#### **Wiley's Championship**

**BBQ:** 4700 Hwy. 80 East,  
Savannah, 912-201-3259,  
[www.wileyschampionshipbbq.com](http://www.wileyschampionshipbbq.com)

#### **Fincher's Bar-B-Q:**

3947 Houston Ave.,  
Macon, 478-788-1900,  
[www.finchersbarbecue.com](http://www.finchersbarbecue.com)

#### **Old Clinton Bar-B-Q:**

4214 Gray Hwy., Gray,  
478-986-3225; 2645 North  
Columbia St., Milledgeville,  
478-454-0080,  
[www.oldclintonbbq.com](http://www.oldclintonbbq.com)  
(4 additional locations in  
Macon and Warner Robins)

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