

Meat Smoking for Beginners

Setting Up a Kettle for Smoking

Here is an easy way to set up your kettle for smoking.



This is not the ONLY way.

This is not the BEST way.

This is the way that you should start learning because it is simple, reproducible and effective.

Start by placing a charcoal basket on the left side of the charcoal grate.



Next, adjust the bottom vents until they are ALMOST closed. The openings on the bottom air vents should look about like this:



Next we are going to fill the charcoal basket with charcoal (Kingsford Blue) and get one side of it lit.

You can get about 35 Kingsford briquettes into a standard charcoal basket. If you don't have a charcoal basket just make a bed of 35-40 briquettes on the side of the grill. Make sure they are spread out; you don't want them all piled up on top of each other.

I use Weber starter cubes to get the charcoal lit. They come in a box of 24 and are super handy.



Lighter cubes
Cubitos de combustible
Cubes allume-feux



24 cubes
24 cubitos
24 cubes

7417

⚠ CAUTION: FLAMMABLE
Do not store near heat or flames. Lighter cubes must be completely burned before cooking. Keep out of the reach of children. Not for consumption. Read carefully other cautions on the rear panel.

⚠ PRECAUCIÓN: INFLAMABLE
No almacenar cerca de fuentes de calor o llamas. Los cubitos de combustible deberán quemarse completamente antes de cocinar. Mantenerlos alejados del alcance de los niños. No aptos para consumo. Lea atentamente otras precauciones en el panel posterior.

⚠ ATTENTION : FACILEMENT INFLAMMABLE
Les allume-feux doivent être entièrement consumés avant de placer des aliments sur le barbecue. Tenir hors de portée des enfants. Conserver à l'écart de toute flamme ou source d'étincelles - Ne pas fumer. Ne pas ingérer. Lisez attentivement les autres mises en garde sur le panneau arrière.

The starter cubes are essentially wax cubes that burn hot, clean and fast.



I place one starter cube in the charcoal basket and use it to light just a few briquettes.



After about 10 minutes a few of the briquettes will have started to burn. Here is what it will look like:



If you don't want to use starter cubes then you can use a charcoal chimney to light two or three briquettes and then use a pair of metal tongs to place them on the side of the charcoal bed.

At this point I add some wood. I am using two chunks of hickory here.



I wanted to know exactly what was happening inside my grill for this demonstration. In order to do so I supported a digital thermometer with a piece of potato and placed it on the right side of the grilling grate where I would normally place whatever I was smoking.



Now you put the lid on the grill with the air vent over whatever you are smoking. Keep the top vent completely open.



You will notice that the thermometer on the lid is DIRECTLY over the fire. The thermometer is going to tell you that the grill is REALLY hot.



Don't worry...over where you are smoking the temperature is just right!

Let's talk about smoking meat and temperature.

You have a choice between making things hard or easy.

Please pick easy.

The First Part of "EASY"

People bicker over the correct smoking temperature constantly. The reality is that some people make amazing barbecue at 225F and some people make amazing barbecue at 325F.

You can make amazing barbecue at any temperature between 225F and 325F as long as you know what you are doing. Don't obsess over an exact temperature!

The Second part of “EASY”

When it comes to temperature go for “just about right” instead of “absolute perfection”.

This technique is going to keep you in the perfect barbecue RANGE but the temperature is going to be changing.

Again, don't obsess over an exact temperature!

Here is the temperature profile the potato was seeing inside the kettle.



At 7:30 I put the lid on the kettle and by 8:15 the potato was seeing temps of 215F. That's slow smoking barbecue territory!

By 9:00 the temperature rose to around 275F and then it started dropping off.

By 10:20 the temperature was back down to 214F.

Between 8:15 and 10:15 we had two solid hours of temperatures that were absolutely perfect for slow smoking barbecue!

Did the temperature fluctuate? Sure.

Do I care? Nope.

Once the temperature dropped into the 210F range I opened the lid. Here is how the charcoal looked.



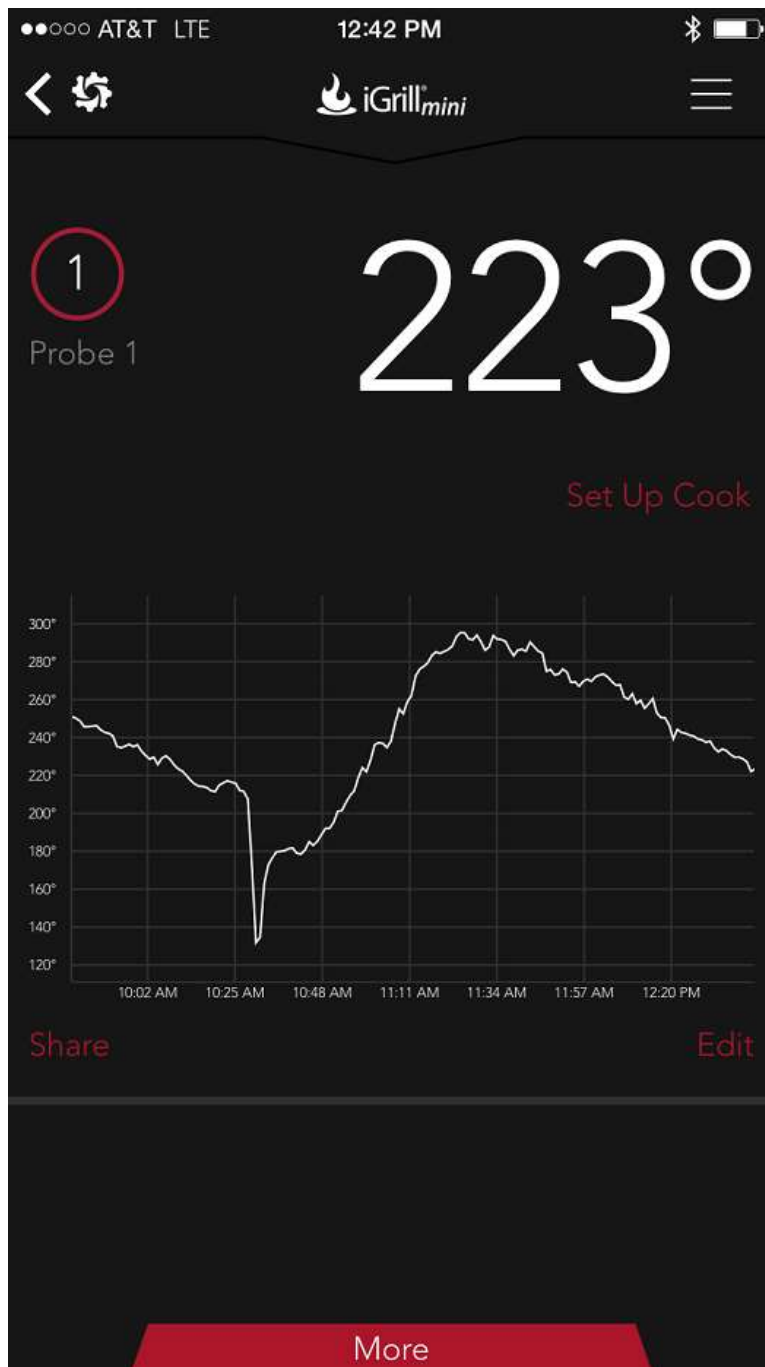
Use a pair of metal tongs to knock off the ash and arrange the remaining charcoal to one side of the basket.



Refill the basket with unlit briquettes and put the lid back on the kettle. By the way, having a hinged cooking grate on your kettle makes this part REALLY easy.



Here is the resulting temperature profile.



You can see I took the lid off and refreshed the charcoal around 10:20.

By 11:00 we were back up to 220F and were back in the barbecue zone.

The temperature briefly got up to 290F before dropping to 223F at 12:45.

You can keep the cycle of refreshing the charcoal going for as long as you like.

This SIMPLE method gave us five solid hours of slow smoking temperatures.

Did we maintain exactly 245F for the entire time? No.

Were we using the “magic temperature” required for “perfect ribs”. No.

Do I care? Nope.

There are tricks and gadgets you can use to get a more stable temperature profile. Don't worry about them right now.

What I just showed you is how I work my kettle for almost everything I smoke.

The temperature profiles I showed you are very typical for using this technique with a 22.5 inch kettle. The profile will be hotter if you are using an 18.5 inch kettle.

The technique is easy, reproducible and is the perfect way to start learning how to barbecue!

*If you want the hardcore barbecue lessons
then sign up for the free [Brisket Boot Camp!](#)*