

Smokin' Okie's Prime Rib 101



11/1/2010

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INTRODUCTION (GENERAL SMOKIN' OKIE STUFF)

Russ Garrett, aka Smokin' Okie, I'm just a guy who just loves BBQ. Actually I'm obsessed with it if you ask my friends and family. I've been BBQ'n since the 60's when Dad used to buy Brisket for .10¢ a pound. I first learned BBQ from trial and error, talking to Pitmasters. With the advent of the Internet I expanded my BBQ by teaching others the art of BBQ. And ART it is as much as Science. I love to talk and teach BBQ having given classes at National Conventions as well as Regional Classes. I've been running the Cookshack BBQ forum since 1999 and have taught to over 10,000 members at this site alone. I compete professionally in KCBS and IBCA and have over 200 ribbons and three People's Choice Wins. I am the reigning champion of the Oklahoma Centennial BBQ Championship.

I will be teaching Turkey 101 for the Holidays and in the spring start a series of BBQ 101 classes, to include Brisket, Ribs, Chicken and General BBQ 101.

PRE-TEST:

1. T/F Prime Rib is called that because it's a PRIME cut of steak.
2. T/F Prime Rib can come from any Rib Roast that is of any grade.
3. T/F I should serve this immediately after cooking while it's still warm.
4. T/F Prime Rib is so difficult I should just buy mine from a local restaurant.
5. T/F The best PR comes from an oven.
6. T/F Standing Rib Roast and Prime Rib are the same thing.

INTRODUCTION AND BUYING PRIME RIB

Prime Rib is one of those Magical Meats. When you say steak, people might think any number of items, but when you say Prime Rib, there's no mistaking the visual of a great big piece of Prime Rib.

For years, Prime Rib has been one of those items reserved for holidays and in a fancy restaurant or the Buffet line. In Prime Rib 101, you'll learn how to do it yourself, at home.

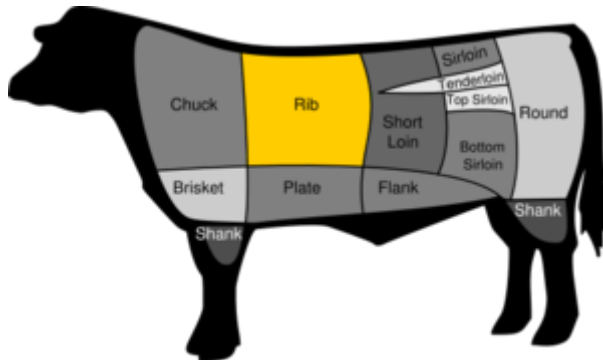
We will cover the basics of buying, preparing and finishing Prime so that you can do it for a special occasion or for just a great backyard event.

My goal in this class, for you, is to achieve Three objectives:

- Smoky, flavorful and juicy Prime Rib
- Perfect cooking (no or little brown/gray outside and pink middle)
- Crust on the outside

What is Prime Rib? Prime Rib is NOT a piece of meat that is graded only as PRIME. According to the US Food Safety and Information Service:

- A colloquial and popular term for this cut is "prime rib". Historically, this name stands out regardless of the grade. In addition, the USDA acknowledges this historical note by not requiring the cut *"to be derived from USDA prime grade beef"*^[1]



Rib Roast, Standing Rib Roast, Prime Rib, there are many different names and too many times you'll have the Meat Market call it something just for marketing purposes or a sale so always make sure you get exactly what you are wanting.

A full standing rib roast has ribs 6-12 of the steer (numbered from the head of the animal to the tail) and typically weight 15 lbs or more. It may be sold in smaller portions, usually a three-rib section. The term "standing" indicates that the rib bones are left intact, and the roast is cooked standing on its rack of ribs.

Chefs and other experts like to get roasts from ribs 10-12 because they have less fat and are more tender.

BUYING

- Buy the small end (ribs 10-12) of a USDA Prime standing rib roast.
- You can tell the difference between these two roasts by comparing the length of their bones. A roast from ribs 6-8 has three short bones, whereas one from ribs 10-12 has three long bones.
- Leave the bones on (for better flavor)
- Buy roast approximately 1lb to 1.25 lbs per person, buy extra, you'll want more
- Grade. Buy a minimum of Choice, Prime if you really want to, but Choice is a great option for your first time. There are lower grades (select, cutter and canner but if it's not Choice/Prime don't waste your money)
- Price. Find value for your choice, but don't skimp. This is a quality end product when done right but you can't make a bad piece of meat taste as good as a great piece of meat.

Beware!!! Some Grocery Stores do a horrible job of labeling their meat - on purpose. When you buy Choice or Prime, make sure carries the USDA shield.

WHEN TO BUY

I like to buy a minimum of one week prior, but prefer to buy mine 40 days before cooking, especially if it's a special occasion. 40 DAYS? Yes, 40 days. That's because I age my meat, but I'm sure you're now asking what IS aging?

AGING

Aging is a process used in the Finest Restaurants to improve the intensity of meat flavor in their beef. IF YOU FOLLOW food safety guidelines, you too can do this at home.

Wet vs. Dry Aging.

Dry aging is a process where the beef is placed in a cold environment with controlled humidity and the outside of the meat will actually dry out. The moisture (not blood) inside the meat will evaporate. To cook, the restaurant will cut off the dried out portion of the beef.

Wet Aging is the process of storing the meat in the **original** cry-o-vac (plastic) bag that the meat arrives in from the meat supplier, you cannot wet age meat once it's been exposed to air. You must know the kill date (or close to it) not the sell by date. Storing this in a refrigerator works, but it **MUST** have the right temp. You can't do this in your regular refrigerator, the temp must remain at 38° or below. If the temp raises above 40° you will decrease the length of time you can age, so your normal refrigerator with the door opening 10 times a day is not a good candidate. 21 days (3 weeks) is a good time to generally go with. **NOTE:** You must make sure there is no air in the cry-o-vac. Any bacteria may enter and potentially spoil the meat.

FOOD SAFETY (HAVE TO COVER THIS)

1. Food Storage:

- a. Store the meat in the original package.
- b. Keep the food below 40°. Any time above 40° will decrease the time the food can be stored safely.

2. Food Prep

- a. Wash all meat after removing from Cry-O-Vac
- b. DO not cross contaminate food. Never prepare beef and chicken on the same plate

3. Food Holding

- a. When holding make sure temperature stays in a safe zone (below 40 or above 140)
- b. Store in your refrigerator when not handling
- c. After serving, store leftover as cold as possible as rapidly as possible

4. Food Serving

- a. Don't cross contaminate. Use separate plates and utensils for serving beef and poultry
- b. No, there is no 5 second rule, even for Prime Rib

5. Food Storage

- a. Cold, Cold, Cold. Know the temp of your refrigerator

TOOLS NEEDED:

- Standing Rib Roast / Prime Rib (choice or better)
- Smoker / Grill / Oven
- Remote Probe Thermometer (calibrated)
- Seasonings
- Ice Chest
- Foil
- Towels
- Sharp Knife

HOW TO SMOKE/COOK PRIME RIB IN ONE SIMPLE PAGE

SMOKING:

1. Take PR out of refrigerator, coat in Worcestershire and then rub with Montreal Steak Seasoning.
2. Smoke for 1 to 3 hour (at about 150 to 210 smoker temp) .
 - Monitor meat temp and remove from smoker at 100
3. Bump the smoker temp up to 375 and place PR back in smoker after 375 is reached so that the outside of the PR gets a great crust from the searing (use oven step 3 below if your smoker can't achieve 375)
 - Watch it like a hawk until it's **125 internal (Medium Rare)**.
4. Hold for minimum of two hours if possible (use Ice Chest Holding method)

OVEN:

1. Take PR out of refrigerator, coat in Worcestershire and then rub with Montreal Steak Seasoning.
2. Set oven for 225.
 - a. Monitor meat temp and remove from oven at 100
3. Bump the oven temp up to 375 and place PR back in oven after 375 is reached so that the outside of the PR gets a great crust from the searing
 - a. Watch it like a hawk until it's 125 internal (Medium Rare)
4. Hold for minimum of two hours if possible (use Ice Chest Holding method)

PREPARATION (THE BEFORE SMOKING STUFF)

Let's get that PR ready.

There is controversy for some whether to let the PR come to room temp before smoking or not. Me? I like to go from a cold refrigerator to a warm smoker, because of the theory that the colder it is, the longer it will be in the optimum smoke zone.

I wash the food after removing from the plastic. This is not required by the Health Dept, but is just a habit to remove any loose pieces of meat and wash off the remaining fluid from wet aging. Using a paper towel, I dry the meat.

Seasoning: For me, I don't like to get fancy on beef. You want the beef flavor to come through. For me, the simple things like salt and pepper work well for beef. Use Kosher Salt (larger crystals). I've also listed some alternative rubs below, but the method applies to all.

Liberally coat the PR in Worcestershire sauce. I actually like the brand I get from Head Country. I then sprinkle Kosher Salt on all sides of the meat, including ends. I finish by applying a medium heavy coating of Montreal Steak Seasoning (basic ingredients are coarse salt, black pepper, dill seed coriander seed, red pepper, garlic and other seasonings. Option: One thing to help this really have a great taste is to add some bacon grease to the outside of the PR. Gives the crust a great flavor.

NOTE: If there will be a lengthy time between seasoning and starting the cook, just put the PR back into the refrigerator. One option is to season overnight if you wish.

Alternative Rubs:

Rub alternative one: Simple. Use just Kosher Salt and Fresh! Cracked Pepper, I prefer to use much more pepper to salt ratio.

Rub alternative two: Herb Crusted. Make up a paste, equal parts of fresh garlic, oregano, parsley, basil, rosemary, black pepper and Seasoned Salt. Use enough olive oil to make a good paste, but thin enough to spread.

Rub alternative three: 1 TB Garlic Powder, 1 TB Dried Rosemary, 2 TB Course Pepper, 2TB salt

Other Options. If you feel the need to be creative, garlic works great. Precook some garlic in the oven, get it soft and then rub it all over the meat before using any salt.

NOTE. Don't bother putting garlic cloves into the meat. Contrary to Ron Popeil, the garlic flavor intensives only that bite and does nothing for the rest of the PR.

SMOKING (HOW TO)

Now for the fun. This is what will separate your PR from the finest ones at any restaurant. Do you HAVE to use a Smoker? No, but if you want a really special PR, Smoking will give you some great results.

Whatever you're smoking on, you **MUST KNOW** absolutely what temp you're cooking at. Quality and duration will suffer if you're guessing. Get a good remote probe thermometer.

Before we start, let's talk about Presentation, how you want it to look? As we all eat with our eyes first, you want to put some effort into making it look the best you can. The best appearance for me is an outside that has a nice, but not "burnt" crust. We achieve that through searing. When you sear depends on the method you use. Method one: Sear first. If you high temp sear, you want to start at 375 or higher and crust the outside until you achieve a nice crust; typically 15 to 30 min. then cook the meat Method two: Smoke/Cook first. For my method here we sear at the end. By cooking it low first, around 200° you allow for a gently cooked piece of meat, with even coloring all the way to the end and then you sear at the very end.

For beef, like PR, I like to smoke several hours, below 225 if possible. I actually prefer 180 or below so that I get longer in the smoke for more penetration. Also, a long, slow temp will give you more red meat and less of that darker color outside you'll see in some PR's (because the outer area cooks more than the inner)

Woods. I love a mix of pecan and cherry. Pecan is similar to Hickory and is native to Oklahoma. Cherry gives the PR a subtle color and flavor.

I can't give you a chart that will work for every smoker, every time. I've just seen, over the years that there are too many variations. **KNOWING** the internal temp of the meat while it's smoking is the one method that will guarantee success. I've seen things like 20 min per pd for Rare, 25 for MR and 30 for Well, but I do not find that reliable, it doesn't take into account the smoker temp or the size/shape of the PR.

WHAT TEMP DO I SHOOT FOR?

This is another one of those "depends on who you ask for what answer you get". I shoot for Medium Rare (MR), which means more red. Beef is one of those things, the longer (more done) you cook it the tougher it will be. For a great quality piece of meat, MR is the standard and I shoot for that standard.

There really is no ONE standard for what Rare or Med Red really are. At best you'll get a range. Do a Google search on "Meat Doneness Charts", there are 1000's with multiple variations on what temps are what. You'll learn what temp you want after you do one or two, for me here is mine.

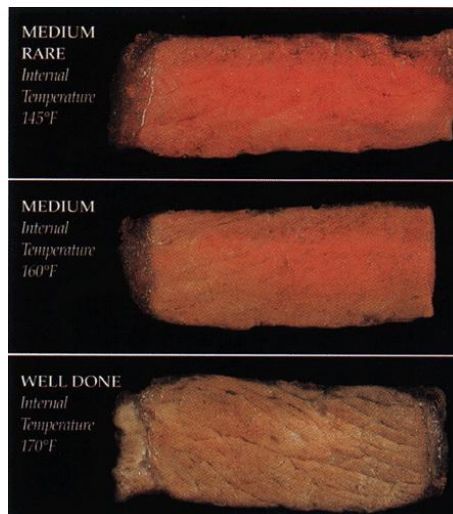
Rare: Below 120

Medium Rare: 125 -135

Medium: 140-150

Dry, Tasteless, Overdone: Above 150 (if you cook a PR to this temp, cook something else and save your money)

Beef Roast Cooking Temperatures		
Rare	120 to 125 degrees F	center is bright red, pinkish toward the exterior portion
Medium Rare	125 to 135 degrees F	center is very pink, slightly brown toward the exterior portion
Medium	140 to 145 degrees F	center is light pink, outer portion is brown
Medium Well	150 to 155 degrees F	not pink
Well Done	160 degrees F and above	steak is uniformly brown throughout



But what do you do when some people want MR, some want Well Done and others want something in between? Easy. Cook it to MR (125) and we'll talk about techniques to get those other pieces:

- The end pieces will be the most done. Save those pieces for those that want Medium to Well Done.
- Use a skillet. You can easily cook a MR piece of PR in a skillet (say one min each side over medium) and it will be Medium to Well Done.
- Cut the slice, and let it sit. PR will change colors once it's exposed to oxygen. Try it. Cut a slice and let it sit. It will lose that red color quickly. Doesn't mean it's not MR, just means Oxygen has affected the color of the meat proteins.

TIP & TRICK ABOUT TEMP:

- When measuring temp, how well does your thermometer measure temp? Ever tested it? I do mine all the time. Simple method is to use boiling water and the thermometer temperature should be near 212 (depending on altitude)
- Keep in mind HOW you're cooking. Are you cooking low and slow or hot and fast? This will affect how quickly the temp changes as you approach completion and it will affect how much "carry over" temp there is. For low and slow it's usually about 5° but for Hot and Fast it could be 10° or more
- Pay attention to where you insert the temperature probe to measure the roast. In the very middle? Near the end? Always check it in multiple spots.

SERVING (WHAT TO DO AFTER SMOKING)

HOLDING

Have you ever cut a steak, RIGHT after cooking, and had the juices run out all over the plate? That's because the meat juices haven't had a chance to settle back into the full cut of meat. RESTING is the key. After cooking, your PR or any steak, let it rest. I'd say 15 min minimum for single steaks and one hour minimum for whole cuts like PR.

How do you hold it? The simplest is in a warm oven where the temp is NO HIGHER than the final temp you want. If you're holding a MR PR in a 200 degree oven it will continue to cook. If you're holding for just an hour, just store it in an empty oven with the temperature turned off.

Another method that works well for holding, and I use this method for holding Briskets, Pork Butts and other large cuts like PR. We call it the F-T-C method. Foil, Towel, Cooler.

F-T-C:

- Foil the meat by wrapping it (which does soften the outside crust so beware)
- Wrap in an old, clean towel
- Place in the smallest Ice Chest Cooler you have. They work well for holding the heat in, not just for keeping things cold

SERVING

You'll want to make this hunk of meat that you've spent so much time on THE centerpiece. A great way to do that is carve at the table. This can present challenges as some people will fight over the end pieces (always happens at our house).

The simplest way is to carve at the preparation table, then serve IMMEDIATELY. The longer the cut meat is on the plate the quicker it will lose color.

You'll find that the cuts towards the two ends will be slightly more cooked than the ones in the middle (this is true if you use a high temp method of searing before you cook)

That's it, cut them as thick or thin as you want.

TIP & TRICK:

- For those people who want their meat more well done than you have, keep a pan of warm au jus handy, and for those folks that can't tolerate any pink a quick soak in the au jus will bring their piece up to more well done in just a minute or two.
- If you're serving a large group, you can actually cut the PR into fourths for more portion control; cut in half and then cut each half in half perpendicular to previous cut.

For serving, you'll want to try three of the traditional items that normally accompany Prime Rib:

AU JUS

- ***Au Jus - Made from Scratch***
 - I make at home fresh when I can. I buy some beef bones (not ribs, I mean bones), maybe 4 to 5 lbs. Add one onion (chopped), 5 or 6 garlic cloves and 2 stalks celery with the bones. A little coating of olive oil helps the process and roast them until they are deeply browned. Once roasting is done, I add them to a large stock pot, pour water over the bones and veggies to cover, add about a cup of white wine or sherry to the mix and let it simmer for an hour. I add a bouquet garni of bay leaf, rosemary, thyme, whole black pepper and a couple of whole cloves. Simmer for another hour, then strain and cool.
 - To a quart of rich beef stock, I add a few sprigs of rosemary, thyme, sage, along with a few smashed garlic cloves. I then let it simmer, covered, for a couple of hours.
- ***Au Jus - Made from Concentrate***
 - You can use a can of Campbell's Beef Consommé in the canned soup section of the grocery store. It's concentrated beef broth with gelatin added for body. To this add sautéed onions, carrot and celery. Simmer together for about 15 minutes. Strained into a saucepan. Added about a TBS of cornstarch to half soup can of water and mixed well. Bring the saucepan to a light boil and gradually add the cornstarch until just slightly thick. For gravy, blend some of the veggies into the Au Jus and add to a roux to thicken. For Au Jus, you want it clear, so discard the veggies.
- ***Au Jus - Tricks and Tips***
 - When you cook, freeze any beef drippings you have left over. Add a couple of packages of AU Jus mix.
 - Add a little bit (few tablespoons) of mashed potato flakes to thicken up the Au Jus
 - For a quick/simple Au Jus, start with a large can of Broth, add a can of French Onion Soup, ½ t sugar, 2 TB Worcestershire sauce and a couple beef bouillon cubes

HORSERADISH CREAM SAUCE

- ½ Cup Heavy Cream
- ½ Cup Prepared Horseradish
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

YORKSHIRE PUDDING

Although traditionally served with roast beef in England with or instead of potatoes, Yorkshire Pudding is nothing more than a popover.

- ¾ cup pre-sifted flour
 - ½ t salt
 - 3 eggs
 - ½ Cup Milk
 - ¼ Cup Water
 - ½ Cup Au Jus
1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.
 2. Onto piece of waxed paper, sift together flour and salt.
 3. In mixing bowl, beat eggs, milk and water. Gradually beat in flour; beat until entire surface bubbles.
 4. Pour beef drippings into 8 inch square baking pan/dish, put in oven until fat starts to smoke.
 5. Pour batter into pan with beef drippings. Bake for 20 minutes or until puffed golden. Cut into squares.
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HINTS (TIPS AND TECHNIQUES)

ALTERNATIVES

- Cut the Prime rib down to one bone each, about 1 1/2" thick. Marinated in Italian Dressing (Mom was doing this way back in the 60's as our Family Secret Steak Marinade)
- A variation best reserved for gas grills, as no smoke flavor will penetrate anyhow, is the salt-encrusted method. Season as you would normally. After that step, lay the roast in a foil covered pan onto a bed of coarse kosher or sea salt. Cover the roast with a heavy paste of kosher salt and water (apply like spackling). Cook to desired internal temp. After removing from oven, crack the salt with a hard object to break it open. Rest as normal.

LEFTOVERS:

- Stuffed baked Potatoes. Cube/chop up the leftovers (separately) and then dump a big chunk on top of a BP. Add whatever else you like.
- French Dip Sandwich. Save all the Au Jus and when your ready to serve, warm up the Au Jus and slice the PR thin. Dip the bread INTO the Au Jus (the longer you dip, the wetter and juicier the bread) and add slices of beef to the bread
- Make Prime Rib Hash.
- Keep any trimmings and scraps from when you serve. Simmer the trimmings and made a large electric roaster full of beef vegetable soup with that. It rocked!

FAQ (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

Okay, with 10 years of helping people cook PR, I've been asked a lot of questions, these are some of the more common ones

Question: *I'm curious. If you did not use any wood could you have not cooked the roasts in your gas oven?*

Answer: Yes. The challenge will be having the lower temps. There aren't too many ovens that will allow you to "hold" the meat at such a low temperature as 125 and 140.

Question: *What about the danger zone that I have been reading about? Since the meat spends so much time between 40 - 140 deg. F and now I see that you only want to get the internal temp. to about 135 deg. F, isn't this dangerous?*

Answer: There's nothing to worry about because the meat is thoroughly pasteurized.

Here's a quote:

"Pasteurization: A process named after scientist Louis Pasteur by which every particle of milk is heated to not lower than 145° F for not less than 30 minutes and promptly cooled to destroy any harmful bacteria that may be present without affecting flavor and food value."

Since the meat is in the oven for hours, no bacteria will survive, especially in the presence of smoke, which is one of the best known preservatives. Don't underestimate the importance of sanitation and proper food handling after the meat is cooked and before it is served though.

Question: *Could you possibly list finishing temps and holding times to get various degrees of doneness (rare, med rare, medium and medium well). I like my PR medium to med rare. The Mrs. hates the sight of blood and the best she can handle is med well.*

Answer: Not knocking how your wife likes her beef, but to most serious cooks and restaurant chefs, prime rib (or even choice) is ruined if taken past 130 degrees or med rare. It ain't for everyone. Basically, they slow cook a whole PR to mid rare. When an order came for mid well or well done PR, they would slice off a piece, place it a metal pan, pour just a bit of au jus over it, and put the pan in the oven until it was the desired temperature. It doesn't take long. Another thing to keep in mind is that the end pieces of the cut will generally be more well done than the center cuts, so your wife might enjoy an "end cut" more.

Question: *Can you really tell much of a difference in Prime vs Choice?*

Answer: It depends. Some people swear they can, but not everyone will. I'd suggest trying Choice first, save a little money. Key thing is to look at the marbling when you buy and decide if it was tender after you cook/eat it. You have to decide for yourself.

Question: *I am not a fan of well done prime rib but there are a couple in my family that won't eat anything but. So the dilemma is how long do I cook the well piece compared to the medium piece so they come out about the same time.*

Answer: As I discussed in the Section on Serving, keep a warm container of Au Jus handy and dip any "pink" cuts for a min or two and the Au Jus will remove any pinkness

Question: My question is...can I go ahead and trim the bones off and place in smoker without the bones or should I leave the bones on during the smoking process?

Answer: Bones are a good thing. Leave them attached as they provide additional flavor. It's very easy to trim them off after cooking. You could also slice the ribs after removing and serve them to anyone that might want one.

Question: Costco was the third place I have checked for prime rib, and they pointed me to the rib roasts that I was standing right in front of that were clearly marked "USDA Choice". Are true prime rib roasts available, or is this what I'm supposed to settle for? Will there be that much difference in the two grades if done with this cooking method?

Answer: As I discussed in selecting a PR, it's hard to prove, that for you PRIME would be a better choice than CHOICE. I recommend trying choice the first time out, you'll easily save 50% of the cost of PRIME.

Question: If I start with a 15lb Prime Rib, how much weight will I lose from cooking?

Answer: You won't have much shrinkage, maybe 20% tops depending on cook temps

Question: I'm scared. This is a lot of money for a Prime Rib, even just getting a CHOICE PR. What can I do to guarantee success?

Answer: First, relax. Second, don't stress about cooking this cut. You're already doing all you can by reading and learning from this PRIME RIB 101. Yes...it is an expensive piece of meat, but it is dead easy to cook.

Question: I've reheated prime rib, never again. Had 2 12# that were ruined a few years back. How can I reheat PR and get the same quality I cooked the first time?

Answer: Key is to watch how you reheat it. Don't cook it a 2nd time by warming it in a 300 degree oven. It's already cooked so you want to just warm it to 140 degrees (which is the minimum food safe temperature). When I KNOW I'm going to be reheating, I cook the first time to a lower temp. This gives me some flexibility in how I reheat. If I cook it to 120° I know I have more room to spare. I also reheat in a lower temp method over longer time, rather than using a high temp method for a short time. Reheating can be difficult, so you just need to know in advance if you'll be doing that.

Question: How much will the temperature rise during the hold period? I am planning on bringing the roast to a temperature of 125 degrees (smoker @250 degrees) and then turning the smoker down to 140 degrees and holding for 4 hrs? Will the temp of the roast rise more than 10 degrees?

Answer: We call this "rise". The amount of rise really depends on how hot you cooked it and how fast it got there. If you were cooking in a 400 degree oven and it's only 15 min a pd, the carryover will easily be 10° possible as much as 15°. Compare that to a PR cooked at 200 which takes much longer to get there. The carryover will be around 5°. yes, that 5° to 10° or 15° will matter in your finished product, so know what will happen after you

pull it from the smoker/oven. It's easy to reheat or cook again after you cut, but you can't help a piece that's overcooked. WATCH YOUR TEMPS!!!



REFERENCES & RESOURCES (BOOKS AND ONLINE RESOURCES)

^[1] Page 136 from <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/oppde/larc/policies/policybook.pdf>