

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH STYLE

# 805 LIVING

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## THE GUYS ISSUE



A traditional Santa Maria-style barbecue: beef seasoned and grilled over oak-wood coals, rancho salsa, *pinquito* beans, and grilled French bread.

# BARBECUE VAQUERO-STYLE

Fire up the zesty flavors brought to Santa Maria by the Spanish cowboys of the 1800s.

BY JAIME LEWIS PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY MOSS

## WHEN IT COMES TO FOODS WITH LOCAL ROOTS,

nothing is more authentic than Santa Maria-style barbecue. A holdover from the days of vaqueros and Spanish ranchos, it's an American foodway whose terroir, so to speak, is expressed through age-old methods such as the traditional willow poles used to skewer the sirloin and the native red oak coals that cook it.

Several establishments have perpetuated the Santa Maria style, most notably the Santa Maria Elks Lodge ([santamariaelks.com](http://santamariaelks.com)), where fire-pit tender Ike Simas started barbecuing 62 years ago. According to Simas, Santa Maria-style barbecue follows a few rules.

## THE RULES

**The meat has to be top sirloin.** Although prime rib was the cut of choice in the 1940s, by the time Simas stepped up to the pit in the early '50s, top sirloin had become the favorite. And he's adamant that's the one to use. However, sometime in the last 20 years, tri-tip entered the Santa Maria scene, and some area restaurants use it exclusively.

**It has to be seasoned right.** Whether you prefer light or aggressive seasoning, the blend is generally half salt, one-quarter pepper, and one-quarter garlic salt. Variations on the blend are available for sale, such as Jocko's Mix ([jockosmix.com](http://jockosmix.com)) and Susie Q's Brand Original Santa Maria Valley Style Seasoning

([susieqbrand.com](http://susieqbrand.com)), which includes parsley.

**The coals have to be red oak.** Be careful buying wood from a grocery store, as it's often a mix of white and red oak. Simas recommends checking the classified ads in your local newspaper for pure red oak. It's also available at Santa Maria BBQ Outfitters ([santamariagrills.com](http://santamariagrills.com)).

## THE MENU

The traditional Santa Maria-style menu consists of barbecued sirloin, salsa, *pinquito* beans, grilled French bread, and a simple green salad, but each establishment puts its own spin on the lineup. Jocko's Steak House (805-929-3686) in Nipomo includes a relish tray as an appetizer and a seasoned baked potato with butter, sour cream, and chives. Shaw's Steakhouse (805-925-5862) in Santa Maria uses tri-tip for its take on the barbecue style.

The following recipes provide generous servings for 10 to 12 people. To serve a smaller group, divide the ingredients by two. The salsa recipe makes extra, so even one-third of the ingredients called for here will likely be sufficient for six. To round out the menu, serve a green salad and a bottle of local pinot noir with the meal and make strawberry shortcake with fresh Santa Maria-grown berries for dessert. >



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## TASTE FOOD

### SANTA MARIA-STYLE BARBECUED SIRLOIN

Serves 12

*For this recipe, Ike Simas of the Santa Maria Elks Lodge skewers sirloin onto steel rods over coals, but let's be real: Nobody does that at home. Hence, the advent of the Santa Maria-style barbecue grill with a variable-height grate, or screen, that adjusts for long, slow cooking (available at Santa Maria BBQ Outfitters). Not interested in buying one? Several parks across the Central Coast offer use of Santa Maria-style barbecue pits for a fee, including Pioneer Park in Santa Maria, Sunny Fields Park in Solvang, and Oak Park in Santa Barbara. The directions here will work for a 12- to 14-pound cut of beef.*

**Red oak wood for grilling**

**4 tablespoons salt**

**2 tablespoons pepper**

**2 tablespoons garlic salt**

**12 pounds top sirloin, untrimmed, sliced in half lengthwise 1- to 1½-inches thick**

**Olive oil for barbecue screen**

Start oak fire in pit and allow wood to burn down to coals, about 1 hour. Mix salt, pepper, and garlic salt in a roasting pan and roll sirloin pieces in seasonings to coat. Allow meat to rest 1 hour at room temperature. Brush barbecue screen with oil and adjust to six inches above the coals, then place meat on screen. Grill for 45 minutes to 1 hour for medium-rare, flipping once halfway through without puncturing meat (if necessary, skewer the fat instead). Remove from heat to a large plate and let rest 20 minutes, then carve against the grain into ½-inch-thick slices and serve with ranchero-style salsa.

### RANCHERO SALSA

Makes almost 3 quarts

*In 1958 ranchers Clarence and Rosalie Minetti opened the Far Western Tavern (farwesterntavern.com), where they showcased their high-quality local beef, barbecued and served with this fresh ranchero salsa. The recipe calls for a seasoning blend of sugar, salt, black pepper, garlic powder, and minced parsley, marketed by their daughter, Susan Righetti, at susieqbrand.com.*

**3 28-ounce cans whole peeled tomatoes**

**1 3½-ounce can green chiles, diced**

**3 cloves garlic, minced**

**1 yellow onion, diced**

**2 drops hot sauce, such as Tabasco, or more as desired**

**2 teaspoons Susie Q's Original Santa Maria Valley Style Seasoning**

In a bowl, mix together all ingredients, breaking up the tomatoes for consistency according to preference. Chill for at least 30 minutes and then serve with Santa Maria-Style Barbecued Sirloin.

### PINQUITO BEANS

Serves 10

*To protect the heritage of Santa Maria-style barbecue, the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce (santamariavisitor.com) copyrighted the official menu in 1978, including this recipe. Smaller than pinto beans and paler in color, pinto beans are indigenous to the fertile Santa Maria Valley. Prepared in the traditional style, these pinquitos are combined with a bit of pork, spices, and tomato sauce, and then cooked long and slow for maximum melding of flavors.*

**1 pound pinto beans**

**1 strip bacon, diced**

**½ cup ham, diced**

**1 clove garlic, minced**

**¾ cup tomato puree**

**¼ cup red chili sauce**

**1 tablespoon sugar**

**1 tablespoon dry mustard**

**1 teaspoon salt**

Place dry beans in a strainer and remove any stones. Rinse beans and transfer them to a pot. Cover them with water and soak overnight. Drain and return beans to the pot, cover with fresh water, and simmer over low heat for 2 hours or until tender. In a skillet over medium heat, sauté bacon and ham until lightly browned. Add garlic and sauté 1 to 2 minutes longer. Add tomato puree, chili sauce, sugar, mustard, and salt. Drain liquid from beans and stir in sauce. Simmer for 30 minutes more. Keep warm until ready to serve. ♦