

Prep Time: 20 minutes | Cook Time: 3 hours 30 minutes | Rest Time: 15 minutes | Total Time: ~4 hours 5 minutes

Yield: 6-8 servings | Difficulty: Intermediate | Method: Smoking / Oven-Adaptable

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Why This Recipe Works

Pork belly burnt ends take everything you love about brisket burnt ends — the caramelized bark, the sticky-sweet glaze, the melt-in-your-mouth fat — and swap in rich, juicy pork belly. Cubed and seasoned generously, the pieces smoke low and slow until tender, then get tossed in a tangy-sweet barbecue glaze and returned to the heat to tack up into glossy, candy-like bites. The result is crispy-edged, deeply flavorful nuggets that disappear at any cookout.

Ingredients

For the Pork Belly

- 3 lbs (1.4 kg) skinless pork belly, cut into 1½-inch cubes
- 2 tbsp yellow mustard (as a binder)
- 3 tbsp barbecue rub (store-bought or homemade, recipe below)

Homemade BBQ Rub (makes ~½ cup)

- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 tbsp coarse black pepper
- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- 2 tsp onion powder

- 1 tsp cayenne pepper (adjust to taste)
- ½ tsp ground mustard

For the Glaze

- ½ cup barbecue sauce
- 3 tbsp honey
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp hot sauce (optional)

Optional Garnish

- Thinly sliced scallions
- Pickled jalapeños

Equipment

- Smoker (or oven — see notes) set to 275°F (135°C)
- Aluminum foil pan or disposable half-pan
- Heavy-duty aluminum foil
- Instant-read thermometer
- Tongs

Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Prep the Pork Belly (20 minutes)

Pat the pork belly cubes completely dry with paper towels — moisture is the enemy of good bark. Trim any excessively thick fat caps so each cube is roughly uniform (about 1½ inches). In a small bowl, combine all rub ingredients. Coat each cube lightly with mustard, then toss generously with the rub, pressing it into the meat. Let the seasoned cubes sit at room temperature for 15–20 minutes while your smoker comes to temperature.

Step 2: Smoke Low and Slow (2 hours at 275°F / 135°C)

Set your smoker to 275°F (135°C) using a fruitwood (apple or cherry) or hickory for a bolder profile. Arrange the cubes on the grates with space between them — no crowding. Smoke for 2 hours, flipping once at the 1-hour mark. Intensity: low, steady heat; light, thin blue smoke. You're building color and rendering fat, not cooking to temperature yet. The cubes should be deeply bronzed but not blackened.

Step 3: Braise to Tenderness (1 hour 30 minutes at 275°F / 135°C)

Transfer the cubes to an aluminum pan. Add 2 tablespoons of water or apple juice, cover tightly with foil, and return to the smoker (or oven) for 1 hour 30 minutes. Intensity: low, moist heat. This braise breaks down collagen and keeps the lean edges from drying out. The pork is ready when a cube offers little resistance to a probe and internal temperature registers 195–200°F (90–93°C).

Step 4: Glaze and Tack Up (30 minutes at 375°F / 190°C)

Drain excess fat from the pan. Whisk together barbecue sauce, honey, butter, vinegar, and hot sauce in a small saucepan over low heat until the butter melts and the glaze is smooth. Pour over the pork cubes and toss gently to coat. Return uncovered to the smoker or oven, raised to 375°F (190°C), for 25–30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. Intensity: medium-high, dry heat. This is where the magic happens — the sugars caramelize, the glaze thickens, and the edges crisp. Watch closely in the final 10 minutes to prevent burning.

Step 5: Rest and Serve (15 minutes)

Remove from heat and let rest 10–15 minutes — the glaze sets and the juices redistribute. Transfer to a serving platter, spoon any pan glaze over the top, and finish with scallions and pickled jalapeños.

Timing & Intensity Summary

Phase	Time	Temp	Intensity
Season & rest	20 min	Room temp	None
Smoke	2 hrs	275°F (135°C)	Low, steady
Foil braise	1 hr 30 min	275°F (135°C)	Low, moist
Glaze & tack	25-30 min	375°F (190°C)	Medium-high, dry
Rest	10-15 min	—	None

Nutrition (per serving, based on 8 servings)

Estimates only; actual values vary by pork belly cut and sauce brand.

- Calories: ~610 kcal
- Total Fat: 48 g (Saturated: 17 g)
- Cholesterol: 95 mg
- Sodium: 640 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 18 g (Sugars: 15 g)
- Protein: 24 g