

SMOKED OVER-THE-TOP PUMPKIN CHILI

A whole pumpkin catches smoky beef drippings, then becomes the serving pot.

SERVES

8

PREP

30 min

SMOKE

2–3 hr

HEAT

250°F

INGREDIENTS

PUMPKIN + SETUP

- 1 sturdy 10–12 lb pumpkin, no cracks or soft spots
- 1 tbsp olive oil, plus more for the pan
- Rimmed foil roasting pan + sturdy wire rack

CHILI BASE

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 can (28 oz) crushed tomatoes
- 1 can (14.5 oz) fire-roasted diced tomatoes
- 2 cans (15 oz each) kidney or pinto beans, drained
- 1 cup low-sodium beef broth, plus more as needed
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 tbsp chili powder
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp each smoked paprika and dried oregano
- 1 cup plain pumpkin purée, optional
- Kosher salt and black pepper

SMOKED BEEF

- 2 lb ground beef, 80/20 or 85/15
- 1 tbsp chili powder
- 1 tsp each cumin, garlic powder, smoked paprika
- 2 tsp kosher salt + 1 tsp black pepper

TO FINISH

- Shredded cheddar, sour cream, sliced jalapeño, as desired
- Green onion or cilantro, optional

METHOD

1 PREHEAT + PREP

Preheat the smoker for indirect cooking at 250°F. Scrub and dry the pumpkin. On a stable nonslip board, cut a wide lid at an angle, remove every seed and string, and lightly oil the cavity. Set it in a rimmed roasting pan for the entire cook and serving.

2 START THE BASE

Sauté onion and bell pepper in oil for 5 minutes. Add garlic for 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes, beans, broth, tomato paste, spices, and optional pumpkin purée. Bring just to a simmer, then carefully ladle into the pumpkin.

3 BUILD “OVER THE TOP”

Mix the beef seasonings gently into the meat and form one loose, even loaf. Secure a smoker-rated stainless rack beyond both sides of the opening so it cannot tip. Center the beef above the chili. Insert a probe into the thickest center without touching the rack.

4 SMOKE TO TEMPERATURE

Cook at 250°F with oak, hickory, apple, or pecan until the beef reaches 160°F, usually 2–3 hours. Go by temperature, not time. Stir the chili after 90 minutes and add broth if it gets too thick.

5 CRUMBLE + FINISH

With heat-resistant gloves, lift the hot rack and beef together onto a rimmed sheet pan. Rest 5 minutes for easier handling, then crumble the fully cooked beef into the pumpkin. Stir and cook 20–30 minutes more, until the chili reaches 165°F.

6 SERVE SAFELY

Keep the pumpkin in its roasting pan. Ladle into bowls, add toppings, and scrape in tender pumpkin flesh if desired. If the shell sags, cracks, or leaks, do not lift it—ladle the chili into a Dutch oven. Refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers within 2 hours; discard the shell.

DON'T TRUST THE CLOCK — TRUST THE THERMOMETER

- Beef must reach 160°F before crumbling; the mixed chili must reach 165°F.
- If the shell sags, cracks, or leaks, do not lift it—ladle the chili into a Dutch oven.
- Carry and serve from the rimmed pan; refrigerate leftovers in shallow containers within 2 hours.