



Simple Sliced Tri-Tip

SAVORY 🍖 | JUICY 💧 | RUSTIC 🔥 | CALIFORNIAN 🌄

*Its like steak night had a party and
everyone's invited*

Vibes - Tri-Tip

Where it came from

Tri-tip comes out of California's Central Coast, where Santa Maria-style barbecue brought it into focus in the late 1800s. Once an overlooked part of the sirloin that was often ground or sold cheaply, the cut gained popularity when local cooks began grilling it over red oak using the Santa Maria grill—a height-adjustable, open-fire setup that allows precise heat control while cooking for a crowd.

Why it endures

Santa Maria barbecue wasn't about excess or spectacle; it grew out of ranching communities that needed food which could feed people well without expensive ingredients or complicated techniques. Tri-tip fit that need perfectly: one affordable cut, seasoned simply, cooked over live fire, and sliced thin so everyone could share.

Vibes - Tri-Tip

Why It Matters

For as long as humans have gathered, shared meals have been one of the easiest ways to create connection. Food designed to be sliced, passed, and eaten together encourages conversation and community, and tri-tip endures because it supports that kind of table—unfussy, generous, and meant to be shared.

Modern Takes

Most people today aren't cooking over red oak pits, but the core idea hasn't changed. Tri-tip is still prepared simply, finished hot, sliced against the grain, and served to groups, whether it shows up on a platter, in a sandwich, or at a backyard gathering—proof that the spirit of Santa Maria barbecue survives even as the tools evolve.

Grandpa Bill's Lab Notes

Grandpa Bill didn't cook by recipes — he cooked by paying attention. He watched how food reacted to heat, salt, and time, and he trusted his senses more than instructions. These notes exist to capture that way of cooking: not as rules to follow, but as observations worth remembering.

Tri-tip is a good example of why this approach works. It doesn't need marinades, sauces, or tricks — but it does respond to timing, restraint, and a few well-made decisions. Small choices about when to season, how gently to cook, and when to stop touching things make a noticeable difference.

The Lab Notes that follow aren't meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive. They're here to highlight the moments that matter — the parts of the process where slowing down a little, or doing less on purpose, leads to better food and a calmer cook.

Lab Notes

On the Salt Brine

Salt early. Then leave it alone. Salting the tri-tip generously and giving it time in the fridge does more than season the surface — it lets the beef catch up with itself. The salt dissolves, moves inward, and seasons the meat all the way through instead of just the outside. This isn't curing, and it isn't complicated. It's just patience. When the beef finally hits the heat, it's already prepared, which is why everything that follows feels easier.

On the Reverse Sear

The reverse sear is about control, not flair. By cooking the tri-tip gently first, the interior comes up evenly instead of racing ahead of the outside. That final blast of heat is only there to build crust — not to save the center from being undercooked or overdone. It's a calmer way to cook meat. Fewer surprises, more margin for error, and a much better sense of when things are actually ready.

Lab Notes

On the Rest

Resting is part of the cook, not something that happens after. When meat comes off the heat, the juices are still moving. Giving the tri-tip time to rest lets everything settle back into place instead of spilling out onto the cutting board. Skipping this step doesn't make dinner faster — it just makes it wetter. A short pause here pays off in every slice.

On the Slice

Tri-tip only asks for one thing: attention. The grain shifts direction across the cut, which means slicing straight through without looking will give you mixed results. Taking a second to notice the muscle fibers — and adjusting your knife as you go — makes the difference between chewy and tender. Cut against the grain, slice thin, and let the meat do the rest.

Ingredients

- 1 tri-tip roast
- Kosher Salt
- Optional: Finishing Seasoning (I suggest the Spicy & Savory Blend)

Its literally that easy!

Cooking Instructions

Salt the meat

Season the tri-tip generously with kosher salt and place it on a wire rack in the fridge overnight. This gives the salt time to penetrate the meat and dry the surface slightly, which leads to better browning later. You're not trying to cure it — just giving the beef a head start.

Start it low

Cook the tri-tip gently at low heat, either in the oven or on the grill, until the interior comes up evenly. A good ambient temp to shoot for during this phase is 250 degrees. This slow start gives you more control and helps prevent the outside from overcooking before the center is ready.

Cooking Instructions

Finish it hot

Once the tri-tip reaches about 130°F internally, finish it over high heat to build a deep, flavorful crust. At this point you're focused on the outside — the interior is already where it needs to be.

Let it rest

Remove the meat from the heat and let it rest before slicing. This pause allows the juices to redistribute instead of spilling out onto the cutting board, which keeps each slice moist and flavorful.

Slice it right

Tri-tip has muscle fibers that change direction across the cut, so take a moment to notice the grain and adjust as you go. Slicing against the grain shortens those fibers and makes the meat more tender.