

## **Make your own Rub.**

I was searching around on Ebay the other day, as you do and came across some Australian, South African and US BBQ rubs and I have to say, some of the prices are staggering, particularly for the imported products!

It started me thinking why people don't make their own; there is a million and one recipes out there!

I think it's the number of ingredients in most rub recipes that dissuades most people; you end up with a small fortune invested in 15-20 ingredients, some of which you only need a small quantity of.

So I started looking for Off the Shelf supermarket products that could make a cheap, simple alternative to the commercial rubs available. I'm aiming for maximum versatility and minimum ingredients, a "Cheats" rub if you like.

I also think that the Australian taste (certainly my taste) prefers a less sweet rub; the joy of making your own is you can adjust the salt, chilli and sugar level to suit your own taste.

You can also "Cheat" the smoke ring intensity by adding a little (and I mean a little) curing salts to the rub.

Whenever you make a rub, think about adding something that you can see easily, not necessarily for flavour but to help you gauge the density of the rub so you get the same covering each time.

This "cheats rub" is fantastic! It's so good I'm giving it a name; I'm calling it **Right on the Money**, a sweet, slightly smokey, deep flavoured Pork or Rib rub. It can be made with only two supermarket ingredients if you want; I'm going all out by using two sugars.

### **Right on the Money Rub**

2 packs Old El Paso fajita mix (I'm guessing this is going to be fairly standard world over)

80g Raw Sugar

50g coffee sugar crystals

Raw sugar is a similar sugar to Coffee Crystals. I've used two sugars here so it "looks the part" and to give a granular texture, a granular texture helps you see that you have an even coat.

You could add a little fresh ground black pepper if you like.

Now let's break down the ingredients in the Fajita mix to see how it's made.

A typical Homemade Fajita mix would be something like this;

1 tablespoon cornflour (corn-starch)

2 teaspoons chili powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon paprika  
1 teaspoon sugar  
3/4 teaspoon crushed chicken stock cube  
1/2 teaspoon onion powder  
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
1/4 teaspoon cumin

So you can see I have replaced all those ten ingredients with one by using the pre-made Fajita mix.

**Right on the Money** rub easy variations:

If you like a little kick, add a half teaspoon of Chilli powder or Cayenne Pepper.

Add some Smoked paprika to increase the Smokey taste and the Red colour.

Add more unrefined Sugar and two crushed Oxo chicken stock (bullion) cubes for a “finishing” rub.

Dried Lemon Zest for a bit of fresh Zing, easy to make, just zest a lemon, (I use a microplane) lay the zest out on a sheet of kitchen paper, the next day it will be dry enough to store in a jar.

Dried rosemary, dried oregano or crushed bay leaf are also good things.

### **Develop your own Signature Rub**

If you feel creative and want to make your own rub you can follow this simple guide, but be sure to measure and weigh meticulously, (I weigh rather than measure, it is more accurate! (The weight of a Teaspoon of table salt is not the same amount as a teaspoon of rock salt). I follow a process that adds the spice and pepper/chili last; this is so I don't over power the more subtle flavours on the way through, at every stage I can taste and make sure I have got the tastes I want, before bringing the heat in.

So: **Salt, Sweet, Herb, Spice, Heat, Fillers** in that order

First to the **Salt**:

A lot of people prefer a Flaked or “Kosher” salt, the increased surface area helps it dissolve better. In Australia use “Flossy” salt from a food wholesaler or Flaked Salt from the supermarket.

Then the **Sugar**:

There are heaps of different kinds, Brown sugar has a tendency to clump due to its moisture content, I avoid the normal “White Death” table sugar, I want a sugar with taste! So I’m looking for one made simply from dehydrating Cane Syrup, Raw Sugar works best for me. Coffee crystals have good flavour and are nice and rustic in the mix. Have a taste of a few sugars and see what you like.

Mix your preferred salt and sugar together till you have a balance of salt and sweet that you like, then move on.

Now you’ve got a Salty, Sweet harmonious balance so it’s on to the **Herbs**:

The Herbs can make it unique or aim it at a particular meat or ethnic style. Garlic, Onion, Celery, Mustard and Oregano are all good with Red meats, Coriander and Thyme lend themselves to Pork and Dill for Fish and Poultry, but these are not Hard and Fast rules, bend them to your own desires, Rosemary works well with Poultry, but you wouldn’t immediately think of it.

You can make a weak Tea from the mix to see how your herbs will work in the final rub, the hot water releases the flavour, making a Tea can be a useful tool!

Almost there! Now to bring in some **Spice**:

So many spices, so little time! This is where you can go nuts and where you can get really confused, a good spice guide will help, but let your taste buds have a say as well, taste them before you use them in your rub, see what you like and add them slowly! When designing a rub, I’ll add the same spice maybe 6 or 7 times, a few grams at a time till I have the taste or nuance I’m looking for, In my recipe notes I will list every addition, and my thoughts on why, this gives me something to come back to if I need to make changes, when I’m happy, I’ll do the math and add it all up into one single weight. Taste as you go and do mini tests; Sprinkle a little cumin in a bowl, add a little allspice and taste it, does it do what you want? What happens if you add more allspice? or if you add cinnamon? If you play like this on the way through, you’ll get a really good idea of what you need to do to build your signature rub! Cumin, Chilli, Paprika are a great place to start, but don’t stop there (or maybe that works for you) also look at some of the more exotic spices.

Again making a Tea can help you get the balance right.

**Pepper/chilli Heat**:

I do this last for one simple reason, it’s easy to overpower the mix and not taste any of the spice and herb, so I add heat last and bit by bit! Again there is a huge variety, and some have real flavour differences, this is where you start to personalise the rub and apply the heat. For pepper, I tend to stick with plain old Black peppercorns, but I will use pink ones for a more “floral” note sometimes. I have a friend who soaks Black peppercorns in Chipotle for a few days then dries them in his smoker...now that’ll add some kick! Try a couple of different kinds, get a feel for what you like, but I

will say, use whole peppercorns and grind them down for freshness, god knows how long that black dust in the supermarket has been hanging around! For Chilli, make sure you use one you can get again, there is a lot of difference between the different chilli offerings, and when you write the recipe, be specific about the brand/type.

#### **Fillers and Flavours:**

Fillers are things with little or no flavour, they are there to serve a purpose, "Filling" out the mix so it spreads further, or adheres to the meat better, it could be included for colour or to increase the volume and make the rub easier to apply.

Baking Soda is an interesting addition, it will promote browning if the product is to be grilled.

So now let's go back to that typical Homemade Fajita mix and reorganise the ingredients to match our Rub development pattern:

#### **Salt:**

1 teaspoon salt

#### **Sugar:**

1 teaspoon sugar

#### **Herb:**

1/2 teaspoon onion powder

1/4 teaspoon garlic powder

#### **Spice:**

1 teaspoon paprika

1/4 teaspoon cumin

#### **Heat:**

2 teaspoons chili powder

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

#### **Fillers and Flavours:**

3/4 teaspoon crushed chicken stock cube

1 tablespoon cornflour (corn-starch)

You can see that developing your own Signature Rub is not that daunting a process if you follow a simple system and make notes as you go.

Do I make my own rub? Yes I do! And I have some quite stunning rubs, brines and injections, some are dead simple, some are quite complex and take time to make, but only a fraction of the time they took to develop.

Having your own unique rub is a great thing, inherently pleasing and good for the soul! I encourage everyone to give it a go, start simple and let your taste lead you! The one thing I will say is, weigh everything and take meticulous notes, if you do find a winning combination, you'll want to be able to duplicate it!

There are some really quite unusual rubs out there, so let's take a couple of the Apple rubs as inspiration and build our own.

For the Apple flavour get some really dry apple chips, if you can't find them get dried apple and dry it further in your oven (you could even smoke dry it in your smoker if you are keen!). Buzz the apple chips into a powder in a spice grinder, the drier this is the better, you don't want your rub clumping up on you!

Follow me through this and you'll get a good idea of how to approach the development process. Start with a basic rub and build it out to where you want it in stages.

### **Apple Rub Development:**

#### **Salt:**

3 Tablespoons Flaked Salt

#### **Sweet:**

3 Tablespoons Brown Sugar

3 Tablespoons Turbinado (Demerara) Sugar

#### **Herb:**

1 Teaspoon Garlic Powder

#### **Spice:**

1 Teaspoon Ground Black Pepper

1 Teaspoon Sweet Smoked Paprika

#### **Heat:**

None (at the moment)

#### **Fillers and Flavours**

6 Tablespoons Ground Dried Apple

Ok, so now we have a reasonably solid if basic Apple Rub. Think about how you want to kick it up to spectacular! For me, I'd like to build the Apple up and increase the herb notes and I want some heat! The Salt/Sweet balance is good, but I'm going to add just a little Coffee Crystal to the mix, more for the chunky look than anything else, although it will counterpoint the heat when I add that.

The Apple will respond well to the kind of flavours you get in Apple pie, so: Allspice, Cinnamon and Ginger sound like a good thing, and the Herb notes could do with a little Coriander or Thyme. Onion powder would add an earthy tone and of course more Apple so it really stands out as an Apple Rub!

So let's start to add a bit at a time (don't forget to taste at each step and make notes).

**Salt:**

None

**Sweet:**

1 Tablespoon Coffee crystals

**Herb:**

1 teaspoon ground Coriander seeds

**Spice:**

1/4 teaspoon whole Allspice

1/4 teaspoon ground Cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground Ginger

**Heat:**

1 teaspoon Chilli powder

**Fillers and Flavours**

6 Tablespoons Ground Dried Apple

Now this is starting to get there, for me, a bit more heat would be good, so I'm going to up the chilli! I didn't add any Onion powder, so I might do that and I'm thinking a little more Cinnamon, but I'll cook with it first.

The flavours will mellow when you cook with the rub, so after I've made the basic adjustments, I'll always cook with it before making any more refinements. The easiest way is to coat a couple of chicken wings and make a little snack!

# Signature BBQ Rub Worksheet.



Ingredients	Stage 1	Adjustments	Second Adjustments
Salt			
Sweet			
Herb			
Spice			
Heat			
Umami			
Fillers			

Remarks: