

## Brisket Expert Jim Cascone of Huntington Meats

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Jim Cascone of Huntington Meats shared the secret to making an amazing brisket.

An amazing brisket is an essential Hanukkah dish, at least for those who eat meat. Personally, this is a dish that always eluded me. I think it's because it requires so much advance planning. My strength is pulling everything together at the last minute! But one of the nice things about Hanukkah is that it lasts eight days so you have plenty of time to get organized for at least one of those nights. This year, Hanukkah started last Sunday and goes through Christmas Day, Sunday, December 25 so my target was the middle of the week.

In the past, we have reported on the local brisket competition among the members of the Los Angeles Tennis Club. (Last year, Windsor Square resident Lizzie Rosman was the winner!) To level the playing field, the club supplies the briskets and it's up to each cook to come up with the best recipe. Always up for learning a new skill, I decided to enter the contest again but this time get professional advice from the purveyor of the meat, Huntington Meats' owner, Jim Cascone.

Cascone met with me last weekend at his shop in the Original Farmers Market. Huntington Meats opened their full service butcher shop there over 36 years ago and is considered one of the best butchers in the city. We met him at the counter stocked with briskets, prime rib roasts and beef filets for the holidays. Cascone explained the various cuts of brisket, the nose off, the flat brisket or the whole brisket, much larger with a point, known as the nose, at the end

“Some people like the point,” said Cascone. “I prefer the flat, that way you get a nice even slices of beef. You want to look for a piece that has a good shape to it.”

In her article this week, Los Angeles Times Test Kitchen Coordinator Julie Giuffrida, offers seven key to the best brisket ever starting with the meat.

“Brisket is the chest muscle of the cow. It is full of tough connective tissue and needs to be cooked for a long time at a low heat to tenderize it. A whole brisket has two parts, the front section, also called the point, which is thicker and more marbled, often with large chunks of fat; and, the back section, also called the flat, which is leaner and often more flavorful. In general, if you plan to slice your brisket, the flat will hold its shape better. If you plan to shred it, go with the point,” wrote Giuffrida.

We settled on a piece that was 7.5 pounds, more than enough for ten people estimating 1/2 pound per person. It's a very large piece of meat but there's a lot of shrinkage with brisket because you cook it so long. Right now, Huntington Meats has a holiday price of \$9.99 a pound, normally, their brisket is priced at \$13.99 per pound.

Cascone said given the quality of his brisket he could guarantee that I would win the brisket contest. He told me he sold three briskets earlier in the week to three women who entered a similar contest at their children's school. They won first, second and third prize!

There are tons of recipes out there for making brisket. The old fashioned way, explained Cascone is to sear the meat first, then add chopped onion and liquid and cook for three to four hours. Some people add packaged onion soup, water, wine, apple cider vinegar, coca-cola, beef broth, tomatoes, etc.

According to Giuffrida, “acid in the sauce such as tomatoes, tomato sauce, wine, vinegar and citrus juice will help to tenderize the proteins and to brighten the overall flavor of the dish.”

We opted to follow Cascone recipe which calls for marinating the meat with a spice blend rub overnight, then adding liquid and roasting for four hours. That was much easier than trying to find a pan large enough to fit, what starts out as a huge piece of meat, to sear on the stove top. The result was delicious and very tender, according to the judges in my house. We'll see how it works at the tennis club later this week!

Here's Cascone's recipe if you want to try it. But keep in mind you need to marinate the brisket overnight in the refrigerator and then you have to cook it for at least four hours, then it needs to rest before you slice it. Some recipes call for refrigerating it overnight and then slicing and serving the next day. That's three days by my count. It's a good thing Hanukah lasts eight nights!

### **Braised Beef Brisket – Recipe from Jim Cascone at Huntington Meats**

#### Ingredients:

1 (6-pound) Beef Brisket from Huntington Meats, trimmed of fat  
1/2 cup BBQ Spice Blend  
4 cups Water (1 cup cold, 3 cups hot)  
1 Tablespoon very finely ground Coffee  
1/4 cup Dark Brown Sugar  
Freshly cracked Black Pepper  
1/4 cup Apple Cider Vinegar, preferably unfiltered

#### Directions:

Rub the brisket generously with spice blend, cover with plastic wrap and let marinate overnight in refrigerator.

Preheat the oven to 350° F.

Put the roast, fat cap up, in a roasting pan. Add 1 cup water to the pan and roast the brisket uncovered for 1 hour.

In a medium bowl, combine the coffee, brown sugar, pepper, to taste, 3 cups hot water and cider vinegar.

Remove the brisket from the oven, pour the coffee mixture over the brisket, cover with foil and braise until brisket reaches an internal temperature of 185° and is fork tender, about 3 hours. Remove to a carving board to let rest.

Simmer the braising liquid in the roasting pan on the stovetop, skimming fat and allow to reduce just slightly or to desired consistency.

Thinly slice beef across the grain and serve with reduced sauce.



This recipe calls for rubbing a barbecue spice blend on the entire brisket and marinating overnight in refrigerator.



The acid from the apple cider vinegar helps tenderize the meat.



The flat cut brisket show here with the fat cap.



A squarish flat brisket allows for even slices.