



SOUTHSIDE MARKET & BARBEQUE: With five Central Texas locations, including the original built in Elgin in 1886, Southside offers beans, macaroni and cheese, potato salad, side salad, baked potatoes and coleslaw. Also on the menu: peach and blackberry cobblers, made fresh daily.



KREUZ MARKET: In Lockhart, the top-selling side is gooey macaroni and cheese. Other favorites include creamed corn and pinto beans loaded with jalapenos, seasoning and brisket.

LJ's BBQ (inset, right): Among the offerings at this family-owned Brenham restaurant: coleslaw, macaroni and cheese and street corn salad.

The SIDES STORY

It's time for Bluebonnet-area barbecue to share the spotlight with its supporting cast, from potato salad to poblano spaghetti.

Story by Eric Webb ● Photos by Sarah Beal

*P*icture a plate of barbecue. Maybe you see brisket with peppery bark guarding a glistening streak of fat. Perhaps there's a shiny link of sausage, the casing ready to snap and reveal the juiciness inside.

Don't forget the beef rib as big as you think your appetite is.

When you're talking Texas barbecue, meat always gets top billing.

But where would Batman be without Robin, or Brooks without Dunn? Solid co-stars are essential to Texas barbecue, and no trip to the pit would be complete without the supporting cast of side dishes.

Most barbecue joints in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region rely on the classics — potato salad, pinto beans and coleslaw. A few restaurants are shaking things up with a fresh take on side dishes.

Barbecue pros know that the side of the plate is valuable real estate, where nostalgia and creativity can be equally delicious. We toured the Bluebonnet service area and stopped at more than a dozen spots to sample side dishes and learn their backstories.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS MEAT

The Bluebonnet region is home to Texas' oldest barbecue restaurants, and the oldest of all is **Southside Market & Barbeque** in Elgin. The business opened its first store in 1886 on Central Avenue.

Hands-on, meat-only dining was the tradition there for decades, even after Southside was purchased in 1968 by the grandparents of current owner and CEO Bryan Bracewell.

Another of Texas' oldest barbecue businesses, at 208 S. Commerce St. in downtown Lockhart, started serving smoked meats in the late 1800s. In 1900, Charles Kreuz Sr. bought that business and sold to-go barbecue. By the 1920s, **Kreuz Market** added tables for diners.

At the oldest barbecue spots, meats had only simple accompaniments — onions, pickles, whole jalapenos, slices of cheddar cheese, and crackers or white bread. This tradition lasted for decades. There were no forks at Kreuz Market, and butcher knives were chained to the tables.

In Elgin, Southside Market's roots as a meat market with a small grocery section set the stage for those early garnishes. Customers would pick items from the dry goods section, then walk down the hall to the barbecue area for their meat. Eventually, the garnishes were moved to where the meat was served.

Another longtime spot, **The Original Black's Barbecue** in Lockhart, today at 215 N. Main St., has been owned by the Black family for more than nine decades. Edgar Black Sr. founded it in 1932 as Northside Grocery & Market, and the

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TRUTH BBQ: At this Brenham restaurant, standout sides include tater tot casserole, left, and corn pudding. Other offerings include citrus and kale salad, Brussels sprouts and sweet potato soufflé.



OUTLAWS BBQ: Its signature Outlaw corn is made with Velveeta, cream cheese, cream of mushroom soup and slices of jalapeno. The restaurant also serves green beans, coleslaw and baked potato-style tater salad.



SMITTY'S MARKET: The cooks still make beans using Edgar 'Smitty' Schmidt's original recipe for beans, which takes four hours to prepare. Other sides include bread, crackers, avocados, cheese, pickles, onions, chips and Blue Bell ice cream.



KREUZ MARKET: Banana pudding, right, is made from a Schmidt family recipe. Pie and ice cream are also available.



NATHAN'S BBQ: Known for its coleslaw, this Brenham restaurant offers traditional sides like potato salad, green and pinto beans, macaroni and cheese and twice-baked potatoes. Additional options include broccoli salad and black-eyed peas. Fresh chips are made daily and a vegetable of the day is available Monday through Friday.

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restaurant first began smoking meat to avoid wasting unsold cuts. Like other early barbecue joints in the region, Black's served meat on pink butcher paper with the traditional bare-bones garnishes.

PASS THE BEANS AND POTATO SALAD

In 1992, Southside Market & Barbeque moved to its current location at 1212 U.S. 290 in Elgin. The restaurant was a spry 110 years old before the first side dishes were added to its menu.

Barbecue businesses are often passed down through generations, with side-dish recipes plucked off the family tree. Adrene Bracewell, owner Bryan Bracewell's grandmother, started using recipes passed down from her German-Texan family to make batches of pinto beans and mayonnaise-based potato salad — simple, budget-friendly options for families.

Coleslaw was added to Southside's menu around 2000, and it was another decade or so before macaroni and cheese, garden salads and baked potatoes were added to the menu.

It also took decades before side dishes made their way to the Kreuz Market menu in Lockhart. The restaurant at the old Commerce Street location changed hands in 1948 when the Kreuz family sold it to longtime employee and butcher Edgar "Smitty" Schmidt.

Fifty-one years later, in 1999, the restaurant was renamed **Smitty's Market** by Schmidt's daughter, Nina Sells.

The first side dishes made it to Smitty's menu in 2001: potato salad and pinto beans, according to owner Sells. The beans, made from a Schmidt family recipe, take four hours to cook. Schmidt's grandson, John Fullilove, brought a simple approach to the beans — only chili pods, bacon and salt are added for flavor.

Today, Smitty's also offers coleslaw, green beans, creamed corn and macaroni and cheese, their most popular side dish.

Another Schmidt sibling, Edgar Schmidt's son, Rick, retained the Kreuz Market name for his barbecue restaurant that opened in 1999 at 619 N. Colorado St. in Lockhart. Sides were introduced there in 2001.

"We started with beans and German potato salad, and it has evolved from there," said Rick Schmidt's son, Keith Schmidt, the current Kreuz Market owner. Today, those two sides and coleslaw are staples. The pinto beans are anything but a tray filler, thanks to big chunks of jalapeno, a spice blend and a not-so-secret ingredient from the pit: well-cooked chopped brisket.

Macaroni and cheese is the most popular side at Kreuz's. Another side, sauerkraut, harks back to Kreuz's German roots, with caraway seeds adding a traditional flavor to the fermented cabbage. Homemade banana pudding is a closing complement to the smoky, salty meats.

At Black's, the first side dish was introduced in 1937 — pinto beans crafted by second generation co-owner Norma Black. The beans served there today still follow her recipe. Other sides followed in the 1970s, all made from family recipes. "It was a practical decision. My mother was a great cook. More and more people were eating out, and they wanted sides," said Kent Black, third-generation pitmaster at the restaurant.

In Brenham, **Nathan's BBQ** has been located at 1307 Prairie Lea St. for almost 15 years. Manager Cyndi Murski said their sides are prepared from recipes that originated with founder Nathan Winkelmann's grandmother. The recipes evolved over time. Traditional potato salad joins coleslaw and baked beans on the menu, and Nathan's creamy macaroni and cheese is its most popular side.

About 13 miles east of Nathan's is **Chappell Hill Sausage Company**, 4255 Sausage Lane. Frank and Clara Cone bought the business in 1968 and for decades produced sausage in bulk for regional stores. In the 1990s, the Cones and their children added a retail store, and in the early 2000s, they opened a restaurant on

What's your sides story?

Barbecue in Texas is a must-have, but the plate isn't complete without the side dishes. We want to hear your sides stories! Do you have a favorite barbecue joint side dish or a fond memory associated with one?

Leave a comment in the barbecue story post on Bluebonnet's Facebook or Instagram for a chance to win a \$50 gift card to your favorite Bluebonnet-area barbecue spot! The deadline is July 20, 2025. The winner will be contacted the following day.

site. The business still sells sausage in bulk.

Tricia Cone said Chappell Hill Sausage Company's vinegar-based coleslaw and mayonnaise-based potato salad are made using family recipes her parents made at home. She and her siblings make the same dishes in their own homes today.

If you grew up in Texas, both taste like good memories.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE PIT

Some barbecue spots across the region stick with only the classic sides while others, like **Outlaws BBQ** at 1380 N. Main St. in Giddings, offer both traditional and unique side dishes.

Outlaws is a popular spot for locals and travelers. They sell coleslaw, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, green beans and pinto beans along with fan-favorite "Outlaw corn" on Fridays and Saturdays only.

Co-owner Shane Hoffman is primarily the pitmaster. Jason Heuerman is "the side guy" who adds Velveeta, cream of mushroom soup, cream cheese and jalapenos to the corn for a unique twist, Hoffman said.

Luling's **City Market** offers its own take on the traditional side duo of beans and potato salad. Its beans are made fresh daily with bacon and salt, and pair well with potato salad and smoked meats, said Joe Capello, City Market's pitmaster and manager.

Another Luling barbecue joint, **Luling Bar-B-Q** at 709 E. Davis St., was founded in 1986. Co-owner Ken Blevins strives for crowd-pleasing tastes for the restaurant's typical mix of lunching locals and urbanites driving in for a day. The pinto beans are seasoned with cumin for a Southwestern twist. The potato salad packs a lot of flavor and texture into one bite. Two of the restaurant's most popular sides are broccoli salad and au gratin potatoes.

In Bureson County, **Matus Bar-B-Q** keeps things simple but soulful. This family-run spot at 304 W. Buck St. in Caldwell has been a local favorite since 1995. Robin Matus and her daughter Renee Matus co-own the business and open the doors on Saturday and Sunday only from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. Regulars know to get there ahead of the crowd because the restaurant often sells out of barbecue by 10 a.m. "We call it barbecue for breakfast," Renee said.

The sides are a modest but meaningful trio: pinto beans, green beans and potato salad. Both beans are made fresh in-house each day and cooked with bacon, because "bacon just makes everything better," Renee said. What they lack in frills, they make up for in heart — and food that keeps customers coming back.

Renee's daughters Ember, 11, and Kennedy, 10, also work each weekend. Ember sells homemade bread that's become a staple of the Matus experience. Renee's son, Marshall, 16, cuts wood for the barbecue pit and takes care of the landscaping.

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CHAPPELL HILL SAUSAGE COMPANY: Laura Aguilera prepares a vinegar-based coleslaw from a family recipe for the on-site restaurant.



OUTLAWS BBQ: Banana and Oreo puddings are the perfect treat for finishing off a meal at this Giddings barbecue spot.



LULING BAR-B-Q: Broccoli salad and potato salad are among the top sides at this restaurant. The broccoli salad includes tomatoes and purple onions in a tangy dressing. The potato salad features boiled potatoes, sweet pickle relish, mayonnaise, mustard, red onions, red peppers and green olives with pimentos.



MATUS BAR-B-Q: Robin Matus, left, and granddaughter Ember, 11, work at the family-run barbecue spot in Caldwell, founded in 1995. Ember helps bake about a dozen loaves of white bread from scratch every Friday to serve on weekends. Robin's daughter, Renee, now runs the business, with help from Ember and her sister, Kennedy, 10, who also assist in the kitchen before sunrise. Food is made fresh daily, and unsold items are donated to their church and a local shelter.



BARBS B Q: Open Saturdays and Sundays in Lockhart from 11 a.m. until sold out. The stew — a mix of corn, squash and pork over white rice — may seem like an outlier but is surprisingly delicate, with a hint of heat in the gravy.

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New generations bring new flavors to tradition. **Barbs B Q**, a women-owned barbecue restaurant founded by Alexis Tovías Morales, Haley Conlin and Chuck Charnichart, is one of the newest names on the Central Texas barbecue scene and it is a bona fide phenomenon. The barbecue joint at 102 E. Market St. in Lockhart has made several best-of lists since opening in 2023. In November, the restaurant earned a prestigious Bib Gourmand from the inaugural Michelin Guide Texas, an award given to exceptional restaurants that offer good value.

The sides at Barbs B Q are part of the reason for the acclaim. The restaurant serves boats full of black beans instead of pinto, and each bite is a flavor bomb. Sometimes you get a smoky slice of sausage, a salty crumble of queso fresco or a fresh note of cilantro.

Stew might seem like an unlikely addition to the regional sides lineup, but Barbs B Q ladles a golden mixture of corn, squash and pork over a bed of white rice.

The “green spaghetti” is another side that has become a trademark: Creamy poblano sauce clings to slurpable noodles, with a flavor as vibrant as the color and a bit of spice in each bite.

Merritt Meat Company in Fayette County also has adventurous tastes. Just steps away from Royers Pie Haven and nestled among vintage boutiques at 197 Henkel Circle in Round Top, Merritt makes yet another case for Bluebonnet-area barbecue.

Merritt Meat Company was originally the Round Top Smokehouse and was renamed in honor of the late Lee Ellis, the former owner whose middle name was Merritt. The new owners, Abbie Byrom-Botello and Leonard Botello IV — who also own Truth BBQ locations in Houston and Brenham — wanted to build on Ellis' legacy, including his menu, which featured some Asian-inspired dishes.

Vegetables get their share of the sides spotlight at Merritt. Oaxacan-style Brussels sprouts are crisp on the outside and tender on the inside, drizzled in tangy, spicy sauce and tossed with a few kicky peppers. The traditional, crisp Texas-style coleslaw is light, with mustard seed-dotted strands of cabbage cutting the heaviness of the rest of the tray — we're looking at you, pulled pork.

Slow down in Washington County, or you might miss the



MERRITT MEAT COMPANY: Sides include Oaxacan-style Brussels sprouts, Texas-style coleslaw and loaded baked potato salad with thick bacon and tender potatoes in a rich, umami dressing. Other house-made options: tater tot casserole with bacon and cheese, citrusy kale salad, pesto bow-tie pasta with sun-dried tomatoes, Texas-style baked beans and creamy corn casserole.

corrugated metal structure that houses **Truth BBQ** at 2990 U.S. 290 in Brenham. It's worth a U-turn for adventurous eaters.

Truth's corn pudding blends fresh, slightly decadent flavors for a comfort food that is soft and gooey, with a few caramelized pieces of gold studded throughout. It's like eating kernels fresh off the cob and a homey Thanksgiving stuffing at the same time.

Truth BBQ's cooks know their way around cheese. The curly noodles of the restaurant's hearty macaroni and cheese have a pleasantly chewy bite and cling to a zingy sauce. Breadcrumbs and cheese on top add texture and a layer of toasty flavor. Then there's the tater tot casserole, tasting like a salty bag of potato chips smothered in a blend of cheese and cream.

Top it all off with Truth's seasonal cake flavors, available now through the fall: triple chocolate, strawberry, coconut, banana and caramel.

Just down the road in Brenham, Matt Cummins, one of the lead cooks at **LJ's BBQ** at 1407 W. Main St., has been handling the sides for a couple of years. There's a practical purpose to traditional sides, he said. Simplicity in cooking means you pay attention to every single thing.

Take, for example, the macaroni and cheese, LJ's most popular side. Developed by pitmaster Corey Cook, it takes four to five hours to cook, Cummins said. They start the macaroni at 5:30 a.m., a low-and-slow process requiring constant stirring.

Street corn salad, a more recent addition to LJ's menu, is one of Cummins' favorites. Smoky corn, charred poblano peppers, mayonnaise, sour cream, cotija cheese, Tajin seasoning and cilantro go into this side.

All these creative twists on traditional sides at barbecue spots across the Bluebonnet region beckon old-timers and newcomers alike. Still some folks prefer to stick with tastes that have withstood the test of time.

Adrene Bracewell is 94 now, so she doesn't come into Southside in Elgin much. The family brings the restaurant's food to her.

“She never tells me the recipes aren't right, but I know I need to check on things if she asks me, ‘So who made the potato salad today?’ or ‘Who made the beans today?’” Bracewell said. “She's too nice to just say it's not right.”

He pays attention to her gentle hints. Who wouldn't want to keep their grandmother happy? ■

— Sara Abrego and Kirsten Tyler contributed to this story



LJ's BBQ: Matt Cummins, pictured, with a day's batch of the most popular side, macaroni and cheese. The dish takes four to five hours to prepare and requires constant stirring. Each ingredient — from starchy pasta water to white American cheese — is added at just the right moment.