

3rd American BBQ Cook-off 2026
@ Harumi Pier Park (harumifutōkōen)



Event Overview

6th draft

2026.01.12

American BBQ Cook-off @ Harumi Wharf Park Executive Committee

Event Overview

Participants will compete by preparing pork ribs and two side dishes. Judging will be based on a point system across six categories:

Appearance (10 points) / Aroma (15 points) / Taste (25 points) / Meat Preparation (25 points) / Side Dishes (10 points) / Plate Presentation (5 points)

Each judge has a total of 90 points. The team with the highest combined score from **five** judges (maximum **450** points) will be the winner.

Organizer : American BBQ Cook-off @ Harumi Wharf Park Executive Committee

(O.GARDEN, Frontier Construction & Partners Co., Ltd., Japan Pitmasters Association, AOZORA Co.)

Sponsor : U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF)

Support (Planned) : U.S. Embassy Agricultural Trade Office (ATO), Tokyo Metropolitan Government
Bureau of Port and Harbor

Operations : AOZORA Co., Japan Pitmasters Association

Date : Friday, March 20, 2026 (National Holiday)

Time : 7:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Venue : O.GARDEN GRILL, Harumi Wharf Park 5-8 Harumi, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Entry Fee : ¥16,500 (including ¥1,500 consumption tax)

Eligibility : Open to anyone who loves American BBQ

Capacity : 8 teams (1–3 members per team)

Competition Details : The event aims to promote authentic American BBQ. Participants will prepare American pork back ribs using the “low and slow” method. Each team must submit a plate with four rib bones and two side dishes. Judging will be based on six criteria: appearance, aroma, taste, meat preparation, side dishes, and plate presentation.

How to Apply : Please apply via the following form: Application Form

Application Deadline : January 31, 2026, 6:00 PM (first-come, first-served basis)

Contact : American BBQ Cook-off @ Harumi Wharf Park Executive Committee Contact:
Ishibashi (O.GARDEN) Email: ishbashi@aozora-2023.com

Provided Equipment : 2 × Weber Original Kettle 57cm / 2 × 4kg bags of Weber briquettes / 2 × charcoal tongs / 1 × charcoal starter / 1 × table (approx. 760D × 1800W × 730H mm) / 1 × 2-burner gas grill with regulator / 1 × cutting board for judging / 2 × Sierra cups for side dishes

Judges : Judges: **5** (to be announced)

Further details will follow the official competition rules.

Competition Rules

These rules are based on the Japan Pitmasters Association (JPA) guidelines and adapted for this event.

大会全般に関する規則

1. This competition aims to promote American barbecue and improve techniques.
We respect BBQ dishes and their creators, the pitmasters, and welcome anyone who loves American BBQ to participate. While the competition is rooted in tradition, we welcome unique ideas regarding BBQ.
2. This competition requires the preparation of BBQ dishes using American pork ribs (back ribs). According to the JPA, BBQ is defined as dishes cooked at low temperatures using wood, charcoal, gas, or electric heat sources in smokers or grills, and must use beef, pork, or chicken. Two side dishes must accompany the main dish. There are no specific rules for the side dishes, but they should complement the pork ribs.
3. Each team must use four pieces of meat (American pork back ribs), which will be provided by the organizers. Pitmasters can select their meat in order of the lottery draw at the meeting. For hygiene purposes, the meat must be stored in a cooler or similar container at 10°C (50°F) or below until the competition begins. Unsanitary meat cannot be used in the competition. Trimming before the start of the competition, aged meat, or pre-marinated or pre-sauced ribs are not permitted. Strict hygiene management must also be maintained for ingredients used in side dishes.
4. Each team must consist of one pit master, who must be aged 18 or over, and up to three assistants. Participation with only one pit master is also permitted. Please note that only pre-registered team members are permitted in the pit area (under the tent). Furthermore, after 2:00 PM, no one other than pit pass holders may enter the designated area surrounding the pit.
5. All four racks provided must be cooked. However, the five rib pieces submitted for judging must come from the same rack. Pieces from different racks may not be mixed. The BBQ concept or theme must be written on the provided form to convey the appeal of your BBQ. Note: Judging is blind, so do not include any personally identifiable information on the form (e.g., "XX Competition Winner"). All ribs not submitted for judging must be cut and handed over to the organizers. They will be shared with other teams, sponsors, pit pass holders etc., during the post-competition social gathering. Ribs must not be provided to others for any reason other than the above.
6. The competition will be evaluated by judges based on separate judging criteria. The total score (out of 90 points) from the barbecue pork ribs and side dish categories will determine the winner. The top three finishers will receive awards. The winner will also receive prize money.
7. The rankings and scores of all participants will be announced.
8. Cooking stations will be assigned by lottery at registration. Check-in begins at 7:00 a.m. All participants must register for the competition at the reception desk before the Pitmasters Meeting.
9. Teams may begin setting up their equipment anytime after check-in. Equipment may be purchased commercially, homemade, or rented from the organizer. However, the organizer may deem certain equipment as dangerous and prohibit its use. Cooking areas must be kept organized and safe. Heat sources for preparing side dishes (e.g., portable gas stoves or burners) are unrestricted unless deemed dangerous. Bring-your-own equipment must be declared during the application process.

Competition Rules

10. Open fires are prohibited. However, lighting fires for cooking barbecue is permitted, but strict management is required. will not be supplied by the organizer. Furthermore, bringing in and using generators that produce noise, such as engine generators, is prohibited. While bringing in portable power sources is permitted, similar to Rule No. 9, only equipment that has been applied for and approved in advance may be brought in.
11. All cooking utensils must be kept clean at all times. Hands should also be kept clean at all times.
12. Aprons and hats must be worn in the cooking area.
13. Animals are not allowed in the cooking area.
14. Using slow cookers or similar warming appliances to keep samples warm is prohibited.
15. If you plan to withdraw from the competition during the event, notify the organizer immediately.
16. The Pitmaster Meeting will be held at the start of registration at 8:00 a.m. Cutting board for presenting ribs to the judges, containers for side dishes, and team name submission forms will be distributed at that time. Pitmasters must check the plates and containers for scratches or stains. Defective containers will be replaced. Submissions using stained or scratched containers will be penalized. Samples of the score sheet, judging criteria, and the competition schedule will also be distributed.
17. Dispose of trash in the provided trash bags, following the designated sorting rules.
18. The competition begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 3:00 p.m. Cooking outside of these times is prohibited. At 3:00 p.m., the pitmaster must place **five bone-in pieces** and two side dishes on the designated cutting board and submit them to the judges along with the slip.
19. Reports of violations against other competitors will only be accepted and investigated before judging begins. No complaints will be accepted after judging has concluded.
20. Appeals regarding judging results will generally not be accepted. However, appeals will be accepted if a major violation is discovered.
21. The organizer assumes no liability for injuries or fatal accidents that occur during the competition.
22. All participants must be treated with respect. Verbal abuse, insulting attitudes or remarks, and violent acts toward other participants are prohibited. Playing music or broadcasting or displaying political or discriminatory messages is also prohibited. If the organizer deems a participant's behavior inappropriate, improvement will be requested. Failure to improve may result in disqualification.
23. Participants deemed unsuitable for the competition by the organizers may lose their eligibility or be asked to leave the venue. In such cases, the organizers shall not be liable for any damages related to the participant's entry fee or other expenses incurred by the participant for the event.
24. Should adverse weather or natural disasters make holding the event difficult, the organizers may cancel it at their discretion. The organizers shall not be liable for any damages incurred by participants as a result.

Judging Criteria

1. Appearance (10 points)	
Color: Whether it has a good brown color (0-5 points)	
Texture of cross-section: Whether it has a firm, uniform appearance of meat fibers (0-5 points)	10
2. Aroma (15 points)	
Aroma intensity: Is the aroma strong and appealing? (0-10 points)	
Aroma balance: Is the balance between the meat's natural aroma and the seasonings appropriate? (0-5 points)	15
3. Taste (25 points)	
Seasoning penetration: Are the seasonings evenly permeated throughout the meat? (0-10 points)	
Texture: Is the meat's tenderness and chewiness appropriate? (0-5 points)	
Flavor Balance: Is the balance of saltiness, sweetness, acidity, spiciness, etc., appropriate? (0-5 points)	25
Flavor Depth: Does the flavor have depth and complexity? (0-5 points)	
4. Meat Cooking (25 points)	
Meat Doneness: Is the meat cooked to the appropriate level? (0-10 points)	
Meat Moisture: Is the meat moist and not dry? (0-5 points)	
Meat Smoke Flavor: Is the smoke flavor appropriate? (0-5 points)	
Fat Melting: Is the fat melted appropriately? (0-5 points)	25
5. Side Dish (10 points)	
Taste: Is the seasoning balanced with the entire plate? (0-10 points)	
Creativity: Is it unique? (0-5 points)	10
6. Plate Presentation (5 points)	
Is the presentation creative and consistent with your own style? (0-5 points)	5
Judging Criteria Total: 90 points (Each judge has a maximum score of 90 points)	90

As this contest has four judges, participants will compete for a maximum total score of 90 points × 5 judges = 450 points (Judges will be announced at a later date)