

SPANISH · GALICIAN ORIGIN · KAMADO FINISH (BASQUE-INFLECTED) ·
STARTER · TAPA · LIGHT MAIN · DINNER-PARTY THEATER

Pulpo a la Brasa

Octopus boiled in salted water with a cork and a bay leaf until just tender, then finished directly over live kamado coals for sixty seconds a side until the skin crisps to a charred translucent lace. Sliced into coins, dusted with pimentón dulce, doused in Arbequina, scattered with flaky salt. The Galician tapa that becomes the Basque main when you put it on the fire.

Protein Whole octopus – 1.5 to 2 kg, fresh or properly-defrosted

Serves 6 as tapa · 3-4 as light main · 2 octopuses yield a dinner-party

Difficulty Intermediate

Active 35 min (boil management + grill finish + plating)

Total 1 h 15 min (40 min boil + 20 min rest + 5 min fire finish)

THE STORY

Why the Cork Is Not Superstition — And Why the Grill Changes Everything

Galician tradition says: to tenderize octopus, boil it with a wine cork. The internet says: the cork does nothing, tradition is superstition, get a sous vide circulator. The internet is wrong about this, but not for the reasons Galicians usually give.

The cork does not contain magic enzymes. The cork does not release tannins that break down muscle. What the cork does is *float* — it sits at the surface of the boiling water with the octopus, and when you gently push the cork down with a spoon to

check the cook, you are gently agitating the water without opening the pot. It is a *stir stick with good handle ergonomics*. That is the actual mechanism, and it is worth using because it reminds you to stir.

Beyond the cork, three things tenderize octopus: (1) buying an already-frozen octopus (freezing damages muscle fibers mechanically — this is actually the single biggest technique, and the reason Spanish markets sell octopus already-frozen), (2) the pot-shock technique — plunging the octopus into boiling water three times before letting it settle into a simmer (sets the outer muscle and keeps it from toughening), and (3) gentle simmer for 35-45 minutes until a fork slides into the thickest part with little resistance.

Traditional Galicia serves pulpo after the boil on a wooden board, with pimentón, EVOO, and flaky salt. It is called *pulpo a la gallega* or *pulpo á feira*, and it is one of the great tapas of Spain. But at the Basque live-fire tradition and at modern Basque-leaning kitchens from San Sebastián to Bilbao, a move has been added: after the boil, the octopus is grilled *directly* over the ember-bed of a wood or charcoal grill for 60 seconds a side. This transforms the dish. The crisped, lightly-charred skin adds a smoky-bitter note that the boiled-only version lacks. The interior stays silken from the boil; the exterior gets the fire. The two cooks marry.

You own a kamado. This is the dish built for it.

Specs

<p>PORTIONS</p> <p>1.5-2 kg whole octopus · 6 tapa / 3-4 light main</p>	<p>KEY TECHNIQUE</p> <p>Boil-then-grill: tender interior + charred exterior</p>	<p>BOIL TEMP</p> <p>95 °C (gentle simmer – NOT rolling boil)</p>	<p>BOIL DURATION</p> <p>35 - 45 min (test at 35, pull when fork slides easy)</p>
<p>GRILL TEMP</p> <p>Very hot direct – 400 - 450 °C over ember bed</p>	<p>GRILL DURATION</p> <p>60 sec/side, scoring grill marks both sides</p>	<p>DIFFICULTY</p> <p>Intermediate</p> <p>●●●○○</p>	<p>ACTIVE TIME</p> <p>35 min</p>
<p>VESSEL</p> <p>Large stockpot + Kamado direct heat</p>	<p>CUISINE</p> <p>Galician origin, Basque kamado finish</p>	<p>PAIRING</p> <p>Albariño (for boil-only) · Txakoli or Godello (for grilled version)</p>	<p>RULE</p> <p>Buy frozen (or freeze before cooking). Three-dips into boiling water. Gentle simmer, not rolling boil.</p>

UMAMI ADAPTATION

What Changed & Why

Two tiers, shared doctrine. The everyday version uses a good-quality defrosted whole octopus from a decent fishmonger or Asian market (freezing is actually GOOD for octopus — it mechanically tenderizes the muscle; never use a 'fresh' octopus that

hasn't been frozen at least 48 hours). No Limits version sources Spanish octopus from the Rías Baixas, shipped frozen, or Moroccan octopus from a premium Miami fishmonger. Spanish pimentón DOP + premium Arbequina finish the dish at the platter.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI	VERSION	WHY
undefined	undefined	undefined	undefined	undefined

INGREDIENTS

What You Need

Everyday

undefined

- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

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- [object Object]
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- [object Object]

No Limits

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- [object Object]
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- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]
- [object Object]

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- [object Object]

EQUIPMENT

Your Kit

- Kamado grill (Pablo ✓) — essential for the char finish

- Lump charcoal — 2-3 kg for the high-heat direct zone

- Large stockpot (8-10 L) for boiling

- Long tongs (45 cm+) for handling the hot octopus

- Kitchen shears (optional) — for trimming away the beak or eye area after boil

- Sharp chef's knife

- Cutting board (wood, large)

- Warmed serving board — traditionally wooden, not ceramic (Galician tradition)

- Infrared thermometer (optional) — for verifying kamado ember-bed temp

- Cork screw (to open the Txakoli bottle, primarily)

MISE EN PLACE

Before You Start

- IF the octopus is not already frozen-and-defrosted: freeze it 48-72 hours, then defrost slowly in the fridge overnight. Skip this step and the octopus will be rubbery.

- Rinse the defrosted octopus under cold water. Inspect the beak (between the arms at center) — if still present, cut out with kitchen shears.

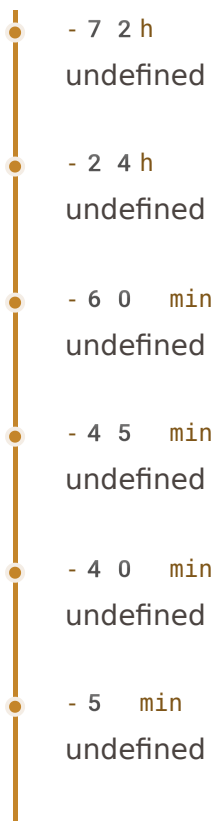
- Fill stockpot with 5-6 L cold water. Add bay leaves, halved onion, cork, and 2 tbsp salt. Bring to a gentle boil.

- Build kamado fire with lump charcoal, direct heat config (no deflector). Target dome temperature 400 °C+ for the brief finish. Kamado takes 25-30 min to hit this temperature from a cold start.

- While the water comes to a boil, dry the octopus with paper towels and place on a plate nearby.

MAKE - AHEAD

Timeline



0 : 0 0
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+ 0 : 2 0
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+ 0 : 2 3
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+ 0 : 2 5
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+ 0 : 2 7
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+ 0 : 2 9
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METHOD

The Cook

1 Phase 1 — Buy or Freeze First

1. **Freezing is essential.** Fresh octopus has a dense interlocked muscle structure that produces a rubber-band texture when cooked. Freezing forms ice crystals inside the muscle, damaging fibers mechanically — after defrosting, the octopus cooks to silken tenderness.
2. Option A: Buy a commercially frozen whole octopus (most Spanish / Mediterranean / Asian markets sell them this way). Defrost slowly in the fridge for 24 hours before cooking.
3. Option B: Buy a fresh octopus and freeze it yourself for 48-72 hours, then defrost. Same result.
4. **Do NOT cook a never-frozen fresh octopus.** Outcome: rubber.

2 Phase 2 — The Three Dips + Gentle Simmer

1. Bring the stockpot to a rolling boil with bay leaves, onion, cork, and 2 tbsp salt. The water should taste like mild seawater.
2. Grasp the octopus by the head (the bulb end). **Dip the tentacles** into the boiling water for 3 seconds, lift out for 5 seconds, dip again for 3 seconds, lift out for 5 seconds, dip a third time.
3. This 'three dip' technique sets the outer skin and prevents the tentacles from shrinking back to a gnarled knot during the long simmer. It is a Galician signature and it makes a visible difference.
4. After the third dip, release the octopus fully into the water. Immediately reduce heat to a **gentle simmer** — small bubbles at the surface, not a rolling boil. Rolling boil = tough octopus. 95 °C target.
5. Simmer uncovered (or loosely covered) for 35-45 minutes. Push the cork down gently with a spoon every 10 minutes — this agitates the water without disturbing the octopus and reminds you to check.
6. At the 35-minute mark, test: insert a fork into the thickest tentacle. It should slide in with **almost no resistance** — like pressing into warm mozzarella. If there's fishy resistance, continue 5-10 more minutes and test again.
7. When done, remove the octopus from the water with a slotted spoon to a plate. Let it rest 20 minutes. The muscle will tighten slightly (normal) and the octopus will be easier to handle. **Do not refrigerate** — serve warm.

3 Phase 3 — The Kamado Finish

1. Build the kamado fire with 2-3 kg lump charcoal, direct heat (no deflector). Target 400-450 °C dome temperature — a HOT fire for quick char. Let the flames die down to a glowing ember bed before cooking.
2. Separate the tentacles from the head by slicing at the base where they meet. The head can be discarded, saved for stock, or sliced and grilled separately (less tender but still good).
3. Lay the tentacles on a plate. Brush lightly with EVOO. Season with a pinch of salt.
4. Place tentacles directly on the kamado grate over the ember bed. **60 seconds one side, 60 seconds the other side.** You want grill marks and a light char — NOT a thorough cook. The octopus is already cooked from the boil; the grill is purely for char + smoke flavor.
5. Pull off the grill when the outsides show dark grill marks and the skin is slightly crisped. Do not overgrill; the interior will dry out.

4 Phase 4 — The Galician Plate

1. Transfer the grilled tentacles to a cutting board. Slice on an angle into **1 cm coins**, revealing the suckers on one side and the meaty cross-section on the other.
2. Plate on a **warmed wooden board** (traditional Galician service — wood holds heat and looks rustic). Ceramic plates are fine too.
3. Arrange the coins in a slightly overlapping pattern, not piled. You want to see each coin.
4. **Drizzle EVOO generously** over the coins — 60-80 ml. Do not skimp; the oil is part of the dish.
5. **Dust with pimentón de la Vera dulce** — enough to color the octopus distinctly red-orange. Add a few pinches of picante if you want heat.
6. **Finish with flaky salt** — several pinches scattered across.
7. Optional: scatter chopped parsley for green contrast.
8. Serve immediately with lemon wedges on the side (traditional, but a great octopus doesn't need lemon) and crusty bread for sopping up the oil.

QUICK REFERENCE

Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
undefined	- 7 2 h	undefined
undefined	- 2 4 h	undefined
undefined	- 6 0 min	undefined
undefined	- 4 5 min	undefined
undefined	- 5 min	undefined
undefined	0 : 0 0	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 2 0	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 2 5	undefined

STEP	TIME	CUE
undefined	+ 0 : 2 7	undefined
undefined	+ 0 : 2 9	undefined

TROUBLESHOOTING

Emergency Protocols

UNDEFINED

Continue simmering 10-15 more min and retest. Some large octopuses need an hour. If still rubbery at 60 min, the octopus was never frozen (or freeze-cycle didn't work). Unfixable — serve as-is, apologize, freeze next time.

UNDEFINED

Rolling boil instead of simmer. Salvageable — the meat is still tender, just in pieces. Plate the pieces on the board, drizzle EVOO + pimentón, serve as 'rustic Galician.' Next time: gentle simmer, not rolling.

UNDEFINED

Kamado wasn't hot enough. Grill marks need 400+ °C. Lower-heat grilling softens the octopus. You can re-grill briefly on a hotter side of the kamado, but the ship is mostly sailed. Serve as boiled-only pulpo gallego with pimentón.

UNDEFINED

Perfectly fine to serve pulpo a la gallega (boil-only) on a wooden board with pimentón. Traditional. No apology needed. Kamado is the upgrade, not the requirement.

UNDEFINED

Drizzle extra EVOO and a squeeze of lemon over the slices. The oil rehydrates somewhat. Next time: 60 sec per side, absolute max.

 **UNDEFINED**

Pimentón added to too-hot oil burns instantly. The finish should be cool pimentón on slightly-warm oil, not sizzling. Replate on clean octopus if possible, adding pimentón last, no heat.

 **UNDEFINED**

Cut out with kitchen shears after the boil when it's easier to see. Not a safety issue, just inedible.

DEEP DIVES

Technique Notes

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TECHNIQUE

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PAIRING

What to Drink

Wine — Traditional (Galician)

Albariño from Rías Baixas — Do Ferreiro Cepas Vellas, Pazo Señoráns Colección, Adegas Galegas

The pulpo + Albariño pairing is canonical in Galicia — both come from the same coast, both eaten together for generations. Saline-mineral-citric Albariño cuts through the EVOO and complements the ocean flavor of the octopus. Serve 9-10 °C. For kamado-finished version, pick a slightly oak-influenced Albariño (aged on lees) that can handle the smoky char.

Wine — For Kamado Version

Godello from Valdeorras — Rafael Palacios Bolo or Bierzo Godello

When the dish is grilled, Godello's subtle oak + richer body handles the char better than lighter Albariño. Adds a hint of buttery roundness. The dish's Galician-Basque fusion register pairs beautifully with a Galician wine that leans slightly darker.

Wine — Basque Alternative

Txakoli de Getaria — Txomin Etxaniz or Ameztoi

If you want to lean into the Basque-finish angle: chilled Txakoli with its slight pétillance mirrors the dish's split character. Pour from height.

CONTEXT

Menu Ideas

This as Dinner-Party Opener

The theatrical starter. Octopus arrives on a warm wooden board dusted red with pimentón. Guests reach with toothpicks or small forks. Sets the Spanish-coastal tone. Pour Albariño while they eat.

Tapa Spread (Galician theme)

Alongside empanada gallega (UMAMI-7) + pulpo on a Galician Sunday-afternoon spread. Add a plate of Padrón peppers, a wedge of Tetilla cheese, and a bottle of Albariño. Done.

Basque Menu Flow

After escalivada (UMAMI-7) and before whole-fish-kamado (UMAMI-6). Pulpo is the second seafood course; the whole fish is the main. All kamado. All live fire. All Basque register.

Light Main (summer)

Larger portion (one octopus between two people) plus cachelos (boiled potatoes drizzled with EVOO + pimentón) + simple green salad. Outdoor summer lunch. Glass of Albariño, siesta after.

Downstream — Cheese Course

A wedge of Tetilla (Galician cow's milk) + membrillo + walnuts. The soft creamy cheese after the smoky-grilled octopus is the Galician continuation.

YOUR NOTES

Cook Log

Session Notes

Date: _____ · Serves: ____ · Rating: __ / 5

Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.



Stop following recipes. Start understanding food.

