

2 UNIQUE



For a 'reel' treat try grilled fish

Summer has swept in fast, hot and furious this year. Barbecuing and grilling seem to be the preferred cooking methods. We are putting everything on the grill from pizza to whole turkeys and loving it. Many people are grilling fish, seafood and shellfish. These jewels of the sea offer a fun and scrumptious change from old doggy hamburgers and steaks.

Seafood consumption has risen 25 percent in the past 10 years, according to industry figures. With this increased demand for a large variety of fresh fish, aquaculture is becoming more and more prevalent. Salmon, oysters, mussels, tilapia and abalone are just a few of the species being successfully farmed.

Color and cut of fish

The color and cut of fish is almost always a sign of flavor intensity and texture. Most all, particularly white fish are milder tasting, flaky and tender. Darker fleshed fish such as mahimahi, bluefish, tuna, swordfish and salmon, are better suited to the grill.

Buying and storing

One of my favorite kitchen proverbs is — "In cooking, as in all the arts, simplicity is the sign of perfection ... Cuisine is when things taste like themselves." (Curnosky).

Buying whole fish is always a good bet. The less fish is processed and handled, the better.

The surface of the fish should be shiny and sparkling, have almost a sheen, and be taut to the touch. Don't be afraid to ask the person you buy your fish from to allow you touch and smell your future dinner for freshness.

Fish should be stiff which indicates it has been recently caught.

A fresh sea or water product will have no odor, except the smell of sea or a fresh pond.

The gills should be red. Avoid any product that appears to have a white film or slime.

Check for any bruises or lacerations, which indicates mishandling. Fillets should appear to have a tight grain, those with gaps indicate age or mishandling.

Look to see if the fish is stored or presented on ice. At home, store fish on ice in a perforated vessel, such as a colander, cover with wax paper or plastic and top with more ice.

Grilling

Darker fleshed fillets, and steaks, approximately 1- to 1 1/2-inches thick, are your best bet.

Build a hot fire or preheat gas grills 10 minutes with cover down before grilling.

Brush steaks or fillets with a little olive oil before placing on clean hot grates. Mix herbs and spices with brushing oil.

Allow 6 1/2 to 8 minutes cooking time per inch of thickness, which is the standard rule of thumb, for proper cooking of fish.

A little Dijon style mustard brushed on about 3 minutes before end of cooking time will add a little zip to salmon or trout.

Try brushing a little hoisin or soy sauce on your next tuna or halibut steak.

A little pesto or dill rub half way through grilling time will add immense flavor.

Chef Kelli L. Lewton is owner of 2 Unique Caterers and Event Planners in Bloomfield Hills. A graduate of Schoolcraft College's Culinary Arts program, Kelli is a part-time instructor at the college. Look for her column in Taste on the second Sunday of the month. See recipes inside.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Focus on Wine
- Men who are rolling in dough

Pur-sonie

into your summer

BY PEGGY MARTIN-EUERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

Outdoor cooking is the way I get my husband, Andrew, involved in the meal, without making mess in my kitchen. However, since we are approaching Father's Day, this is a great time for all of us to review a few grilling basics.

We recently came across a booklet from AAA, called "Grill and Skillet." It is fascinating to read how barbecuing has changed over the years, and yet how the basic cooking methods have remained the same.

The booklet, published by AAA Michigan, says that the first outdoor cook in Michigan was probably a Mound Builder who squatted over the coals of his fire and turned out medium-rare muskrat. Then came Native Americans, followed by Grosseliers and Radisson, the first explorers of Lake Superior country back in 1659.

"The first thing to be kept in mind in this outdoor cooking is that it should be simple — no elaborate dishes," says The Old AAA Traveler. "And you won't need elaborate dishes, for there's always an appetite in the open air."

Isn't that the truth! Camping, hiking, fishing or other outdoor activities can make for hearty appetites.

To grill or barbecue

Although many people use the words interchangeably, there is a difference between grilling and barbecuing.

The main idea behind grilling is to cook hot and fast. It is exactly like broiling except the heat source is on the bottom not the top. You want to get a nice, slightly charred, seared crust on the food exterior while cooking the interior to the desired degree of doneness. Grilling tends to dry out food. This is why grilled food is normally served with a sauce or dressing.

The first rule of barbecuing is "low and slow." The temperature at the surface of the meat should be 200° to 275° F. It is always best to check the temperature with a food thermometer, rather than your eyes or by touch.

True barbecuing usually involves indirect cooking with smoke. The meat may take from three to 24 hours to cook. For me, tasty barbecue food gets barbecued in a spicy sauce.

Whichever method you decide to use, here are some ideas that sizzle:

■ Oil the grates. Using some vegetable oil or meat fat.

■ Trim off the rim or collar of fat on steaks and chops before grilling to reduce the risk of flame fire up.

■ Make a few cuts around the exterior of the meat so it doesn't curl up under the high heat.

■ Avoid excessively thick cuts of meat. Anything more than 1 1/2 inches thick may not cook thor-

oughly inside before burning on the outside.

■ Brush the food with oil during cooking. Apply barbecue sauce only during the last 12 to 20 minutes of cooking.

■ Cook over glowing coals covered with ash. Try this test to see whether your coals are hot enough. Carefully put your hand a couple of inches above the hot coals and about where your rack sits. If you can hold your hand there for about two seconds ("One Mississippi, two Mississippi") then the coals are about perfect.

■ Cook chicken and other poultry bony side down. The bones will transfer heat to the flesh above and provide insulation. Finish cooking on the fleshly side, but to keep the skin from sticking, make sure to lower the heat.

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■ When grilling sausage, don't get the grill too hot or the casing may burst and you'll lose flavor.

■ Always use tongs so as not to puncture the casing.

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