

Smoke Salmon at Home

By Joe Talent

Typically when you think of smoked salmon you think of the mass produced, pre-packaged stuff. This is good as an appetizer or a snack. But what if you want a meal out of it? Then it's time to fire up the smoker. Smoking a salmon will not take a lot of time or effort. This is a simple task and you will enjoy the taste and savings of smoking a salmon yourself.

Salmon is a wonderful food. The omega-3 fatty acids are not only good for your body, but recent studies have found that they act as an anti-depressant. Smoking is a great way to trap in the good stuff and make it even tastier than salmon already is.

You can smoke salmon steaks or fillets. The fillets will absorb a little more of the smoke flavor but can be a bit more difficult to work with. It is recommended placing the salmon on a piece of aluminum foil when you place it on the smoker. Cut or fold the foil to the size and shape of the fish so that it doesn't block any of the rising smoke.

As for smoke the traditional wood for smoking salmon is alder. This is what the Native Americans of the northwest used for a thousand years or so and it imparts a great flavor to the salmon. You don't want to over power the salmon with woods like mesquite or hickory, but if you can't get and alder, try apple.

Below are a few recipes for smoking salmon:

Fennel Smoked Salmon

Preparation: Smoke

1 1/2 pounds salmon fillets

1/4 cup kosher salt

1 bulb fennel

water

black pepper

Place salmon in a shallow baking dish. Place enough water in a saucepan to cover the salmon. Add salt and heat until salt is completely dissolved. Cool and pour over salmon. Let sit in the refrigerator over night. Place salmon on wire racks to dry for about 30 minutes. Prepare smoker. Slice fennel bulb into thin slices from top to bottom. When the smoker is ready place the fennel on

the grating and place the salmon on top of the fennel. Sprinkle with pepper and let smoke for about 1 to 2 hours. Salmon is done when it no longer appears wet, flakes easily, but is still moist.

Jerked Salmon

Preparation: Smoke

1 1/2 pound salmon fillet

Jerk Rub

1 tablespoon onion powder

1 tablespoon dried onion flakes

1 teaspoon ground allspice

1 teaspoon black pepper

1 teaspoon cayenne

3/4 teaspoon thyme

3/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon nutmeg

Jerk Barbecue Sauce

1 cup seafood stock

2 tablespoons honey

1 tablespoon tamarind

1 tablespoon ginger root, minced

1 tablespoon jerk rub (see above)

Combine rub ingredients and mix together. Reserve 1 tablespoon for the sauce and rub over the surface of the salmon. Let sit for 1 to 2 hours. Prepare smoker for a 1 hour smoke at about 200 degrees. Use alder or apple wood for smoke. Let salmon sit at room temperature for about 20 minutes before placing in smoker. Place salmon on smoker and let smoke for 1 hour or until it is cooked all the way through. Make sauce by mixing all ingredients in a saucepan over a high heat. When it boils, reduce the heat to a simmer and let it cook down by about a third. About 5 to 10 minutes. Keep warm. When the salmon is done carefully remove and place on platter. Serve with sauce on the side.

Maple Smoked Salmon

Before you get too excited and think this is the translucent, sinewy, lox-style salmon, you should know this is "smoked" fish - a meaty, smoky, succulent, magenta wonder that is unlike lox but is not regular baked fish either. It's more like the Jewish style carp and whitefish (which, by the way, would probably work very well with this recipe). Before you click off in disappointment, be advised that this is an outstanding delicacy. It makes a wonderful appetizer. You can use hickory or maple chips for this recipe.

2 1/2 pounds salmon fillets
1 tablespoon white sugar
1 tablespoon brown sugar
4 to 5 teaspoons coarse kosher or pickling salt
1/4 teaspoon coarse ground pepper
1/3 cup pure maple syrup, approximately

Smoker preparation

1-2 cups maple chips (hickory is good as well) soaked in water an hour before using.

Rinse fish and dry well. Mix white sugar, brown sugar, salt and pepper together. Pat half of this mixture over top surface of each fillet. Wrap each fillet snugly in parchment paper, then tightly wrap in foil to make neat packets. Place in a shallow dish. Weigh down packets (a can on top of a plate) and refrigerate for 24 hours.

Preheat smoker according to manufacturer's directions, leaving center of coal grate shallower than sides (you want more heat going up and around fish rather than directly beneath it). Fill water tray.

When briquettes/coals are ash gray, throw on about 1 cup of wet chips. Place water tray on top. Place fish, skin side down on grill, drizzle on maple syrup (a couple of tablespoons per fillet). Allow to smoke, about 1 hour, keeping coals quite hot but not red hot. Re-apply maple syrup, every 30 minutes.

After an hour, replace coals if necessary, and add more chips (usually heat is fine, but you may have to add more chips, another 1/2-1 cup). Smoke until fish is deep in color, and flakes apart easily. It will have shrunk quite a bit. Refrigerate fish until well chilled before serving. Slice thinly.