



Chef/Partner Wendy Lopez shows Mediterranean seabass pibil, at Reyes Mezcaleria.

Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel-TNS

## 'It's a feast'

### Make a showstopper by serving a whole fish

By AMY DREW THOMPSON • Orlando Sentinel

ORLANDO, Fla. — A whole fish, says Wendy Lopez, is a showstopper.

"It's a special thing," she says. "You bring it out and drop it on the table and there's this wow factor — it's a feast!"

Lopez, whose executive role at Reyes Mezcaleria recently expanded to Chef Partner (likely due in part to showstopper dishes like the banana leaf-wrapped Mediterranean seabass pibil), says it's a perfect feast for your summer table to boot — lighter and fresher than the pork with which this deep, earthy sauce is often paired — and much easier to cook than its impressive presentation lets on.

Her move into a partner role, too, has been simpler than it might seem, thanks to a cohesive staff, support from the top and a family foundation of hospitality.

"My parents are restaurant owners, so I've always had that mentality, treating the

restaurant as though it's mine — my money, my staff, holding myself accountable. And Jason (Chin, of Good Salt Restaurant Group) has always made us feel like we're owners and partners at every level, so it's been a simple transition. I feel important as one moving piece of the restaurant, but it takes a million people to run this place."

It's also about good relationships, says Lopez, which is something she says also plays into one's ease in cooking fish

at home.

"Step One is knowing your fishmonger," she notes. "Whether you shop at Publix or Lombardi's or wherever you choose to go, you should build a relationship with the people who work there and get used to asking questions, 'Hey, what's fresh today? What's in season? What would you recommend?'"

Seafood pros are also extremely knowledgeable when it comes to prep and will be happy to answer questions.

"You can even give them information about the flavor profile you're looking for. If you're looking to avoid fatty, don't get salmon. If you want light and refreshing, you can try halibut, grouper or snapper. They're also great at pointing you toward things that are Florida-local."

And though the whole-fish look is supremely impressive (and if you ask me, better, because of that crispy skin and its insulating properties as the flesh cooks inside) you can always opt to prep the below recipe with filets instead. Either way, there are lessons about indigenous Mexican cooking to be learned.

"Everyone knows Mexico City, everyone knows Baja California, and I like focusing on areas that are just as beautiful, that have made impacts on the culture."

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Chef/partner Wendy Lopez shows how to prepare Mediterranean seabass pibil, at Reyes Mezcaleria.

Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel-TNS

## Crispy chicken, without so much fat, oil

By GRETCHEN MCKAY  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

If you love fried food but hate the fat and calories that come with cooking something in oil, an air fryer can come to the rescue. It uses hot air to cook whatever protein or veggies you put in its basket and makes them surprisingly crisp — typically without much mess and in pretty quick fashion.

This gluten-free version of salt and pepper chicken, a popular Taiwanese street food, is perfect for those hot days of summer when you just don't feel like standing in front of a stove. Another plus: There's a good chance you have most of the ingredients on hand, and it couldn't be easier to prepare.

Chunks of boneless chicken thigh are marinated in garlic and fresh ginger, dredged in cornstarch and then air fried until every piece is golden-brown and crispy. It's then tossed and coated in a spicy mix of white pepper, salt and fragrant Chinese five spice and garnished with basil and chili.

Salt and pepper chicken is often served as a snack, but I paired it with steamed rice and quick-pickled cucumbers for a light summer main dish.

### AIR FRYER SALT AND PEPPER CHICKEN

- For marinade
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
  - 3 cloves garlic, finely grated
  - 1 tablespoon finely grated ginger
  - 1 teaspoon brown sugar (or regular sugar)
  - 1/2 teaspoon salt
- For chicken
- 1 pound boneless skinless chicken thighs, cut to 1-inch pieces
  - 1/2 cup cornstarch
- Oil spray
- For spice mix
- 2 teaspoons white pepper powder
  - 1 teaspoon salt
  - 1/2 teaspoon brown sugar
  - 1/8 teaspoon five-spice powder
- For optional garnishes
- Sliced basil
  - Lemon wedges
  - Sliced hot peppers of your choice

Combine marinade ingredients in a big bowl. Add diced chicken and mix well. Marinate for at least 30 minutes at room temperature, or up to overnight in the fridge.

Combine the ingredients for the spice mix in a small bowl and stir to mix well. (You will get more spice mix than you might end up using, so adjust the seasoning according to your preference.)

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## OSU Extension's food safety and preservation hotline open

EO Media Group

CORVALLIS — With canning season underway, the Food Safety and Preservation hotline from Oregon State University Extension Service is now taking calls.

The toll-free hotline, 800-354-7319, runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, until Oct. 7. When the hotline is closed, callers can leave a message. The hotline is staffed by certified Master Food Preserver volunteers in Lane and Douglas counties. The volunteers fielded 1,487 calls to the hotline in 2021.

Most commonly, hotline callers ask about preserving salsa, tomatoes and tuna. OSU Extension offers publications on each:

Salsa Recipes for Canning, Canning Seafood, Canning Tomatoes and Tomato Products and Safely Canning Foods: Pressure Canners, Pressure Cookers and Electric Pressure Cookers.

Additional publications and fact sheets are available on the OSU Extension website — [extension.oregonstate.edu/food/preservation](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/food/preservation).

Launched in 1980 in Lane County, the Master Food Preserver program has grown to include more than 300 Master Food Preservers who must complete an eight-week course to be certified and start volunteer shifts on the hotline.

Extension's Ask an Expert, an online question-and-answer service, is another way

to get information. Extension experts can offer information about anything related to food preservation — from safety concerns to recipes — and strive to respond within two business days.

There's also a free app — Canning Timer & Checklist — that provides reminders of essential steps in the canning process.

Additionally, several Extension offices offer free pressure canner dial gauge testing. Hotline volunteers can provide you with information specific to your county.

» OSU Extension Master Food Preservers make tomatillo/green tomato salsa.  
Jeanne Brandt/Contributed Photo

