

For foolproof baked salmon, reach for foil and make packets

By **MELISSA D'ARABIAN**
Associated Press

We all know that eating fish several times a week is a healthy goal. But a lot of otherwise accomplished home cooks still find cooking fish a bit intimidating. The biggest worry? Drying it out.

I'd love to say that this fear is unfounded, but truth is that it's easy to overcook fish. This is why I always pull the fish out a minute or two before I think it's done. Usually, that will result in perfectly moist and tender results.

Another trick: en papillote, or packet method of cooking. Cooking fish en papillote is a super-easy way to increase (significantly!) the margin of error, that window when the fish is cooked, but not overcooked. That's because cooking the fish in a tightly sealed packet creates a dome of steam that gently cooks the fish (and any other ingredients in the packet), keeping all those tasty juices right inside.

That cooking time forgiveness is pure culinary gold! En papillote traditionally is done using kitchen parchment, but foil packets are handy and can get tossed on the grill in summer. Just be aware that foil can react with acid, so if you are using a lot of lemon juice for an en papillote recipe, it's better to go with parchment



AP Photo/J.M. Hirsch

Salmon packets with curry and green beans and a side of rice.

(but not for the grill).

For each packet, spray a heavy-duty piece of foil with cooking spray. Then set a serving of fish on top, following by any other ingredients you like. I like to include a sauce or paste for flavor (maybe pesto or a little white wine), an aromatic (such as minced onion), and some finely chopped veggies. If the veggies are heartier (such as sweet potatoes), parcook them first (a quick microwave steam is fine).

Fish foil packets are versatile and weeknight-friendly. You can assemble them in advance and just toss them in the oven when you get home from work. You'll find it much easier to hit that fish allotment each week.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook, "Supermarket Healthy." <http://www.melissadarabian.net>

SALMON PACKETS WITH CURRY AND GREEN BEANS

Start to finish: 30 minutes
Servings: 6

- Six 5-ounce salmon fillets
- Kosher salt and ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons red curry paste
- 2 teaspoons fish sauce
- 1/4 cup chopped pineapple (canned is fine)
- 1 teaspoon Asian chili sauce (optional)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chopped Thai basil (or regular basil if not available)
- 1 teaspoon lime zest
- 1/2 cup light canned coconut milk
- 3 shallots, thinly sliced
- 1/2 red bell pepper, sliced into matchsticks
- 1/2 pound thin green beans (haricots verts), trimmed

Heat the oven to 375 F. Coat 6 large rectangles of heavy foil with cooking spray.

Season the salmon with salt and pepper, then set aside.

In a small bowl, mix the curry paste and fish sauce. Add the pineapple, chili sauce, garlic, basil, lime zest and coconut milk. Mix well.

Divide the shallots evenly among the prepared sheets of foil, spreading them evenly in the center of each rectangle. Set a salmon fillet over the shallots on each sheet, then spoon some of the sauce over the salmon, dividing it evenly between the servings. Top each with red pepper slices and green beans, then fold up the sides of the foil to create loose packets. Be sure to crimp the packets well so they contain any steam.

Place the packets on a baking sheet and bake until the salmon is cooked through, 15 to 20 minutes. Be careful when opening; the packets will release hot steam.

Nutrition information per serving: 310 calories; 140 calories from fat (45 percent of total calories); 16 g fat (5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 70 mg cholesterol; 660 mg sodium; 11 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 30 g protein.



AP Photo/J.M. Hirsch

This classic salad is given tons of new interest with the addition of spelt, canned hearts of palm and a generous helping of fresh herbs.

Use whole grains to spruce up that old three-bean salad

By **KATIE WORKMAN**
Associated Press

In certain parts of the country, a good three-bean salad is almost always the anchor to a potluck or picnic, the kinds of gatherings where sturdy, crowd-pleasing, portable — and frankly inexpensive — food is wanted.

There have been countless variations of three-bean salads made with nothing more complex than the beans and bottled vinaigrette. And they've most certainly been well received. But after a while those salads can start to feel heavy and monotonous. I was after something with a fresher feel.

In this version, the addition of spelt and canned hearts of palm adds tons of interest. A generous amount of fresh herbs provides brightness. Spelt is a whole grain that been around since ancient times, but now it is only commonly grown in Europe. It fell out of favor in the early 1900s, but now that whole grains are back in the spotlight, it's becoming popular again. It's quite

chewy and nutty, with large, fat rice-shaped grains.

Some people who have wheat intolerances can enjoy spelt, but it is a member of the wheat family, so it's not suitable for people who are celiac or have more serious wheat aversions. It usually is soaked for several hours before cooking, which reduces the cooking time.

When you are cooking the spelt for this recipe, consider making extra. It's nice to have later in the week for tossing into pilafs, soups and stews. Soak 1 cup of spelt grains in enough water to cover overnight. When ready to cook, drain the spelt. Bring 3 cups of water or broth to a simmer in a medium pot over medium-high heat, add the drained spelt and simmer for about 1 hour, or until the spelt is tender.

Katie Workman has written two cookbooks focused on easy, family-friendly cooking, "Dinner Solved!" and "The Mom 100 Cookbook." She blogs at <http://www.themom100.com/about-katie-workman/>

BRIGHT AND HERBY THREE-BEAN SALAD

The dressing for this bean salad is quite thick — close to a pesto consistency — but it distributes itself perfectly over the ingredients. Change up the herbs as you like, and feel free to add some other fresh vegetables as well, such as diced zucchini, tomatoes or avocado. If so, add those shortly before serving. With that exception, you can make this salad up to three days ahead and store it, covered, in the refrigerator.

Start to finish: 15 minutes
Servings: 8

- 14-ounce can hearts of palm, drained and rinsed, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 15 1/2-ounce can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 15 1/2-ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 15 1/2-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup cooked, cooled spelt (see above or follow package directions)
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh

- parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
 - 2 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
 - 1/4 cup rice vinegar
 - 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
 - 1/2 cup finely chopped red onion
 - Kosher salt and ground black pepper

In a large serving bowl, mix together the hearts of palm, kidney beans, chickpeas, black beans and cooked spelt.

In a small bowl, mix together the parsley, basil, thyme, vinegar, olive oil and onion. Season with salt and pepper. Pour the dressing over the bean salad and toss to coat evenly. Serve at room temperature or slightly chilled.

Nutrition information per serving: 240 calories; 45 calories from fat (21 percent of total calories); 5 g fat (0.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 610 mg sodium; 38 g carbohydrate; 13 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 13 g protein.

Singapore: colonial heritage, cool modern architecture, food

By **AMIR BIBAWY**
Associated Press

SINGAPORE — At 51, Singapore is shrugging off all symptoms of a midlife crisis and embracing travelers with more and better things to see, taste and experience than ever before.

The tiny city-state with a living standard the envy of many nations recently celebrated 50 years of independence since being thrown out of the Malaysian federation. Back then there was no telling what the future held; the nation's founder Lee Kuan Yew reportedly cried as he announced the split. But Singapore has emerged as one of Asia's most prosperous, multi-cultural and stable countries. It's also famously clean, with strict laws against littering.

Travelers have long used Singapore as a stopover en route to more exotic Asian destinations. But there's enough here for a longer stay. Attractions can be split into neat categories: colonial heritage, contemporary attractions, ethnic neighborhoods, food and shopping. Coupled with stunningly efficient transportation, it's easy to plan an itinerary lasting several days.

I started my visit with a walk exploring Singapore's British colonial past along the city's quays. Historic buildings here include the Gothic St. Andrew's Cathedral, Victoria Theatre and the Empress Place Building, which houses the intriguing Asian Civilisations Museum. The famous Raffles Hotel is a colonial gem that has hosted the likes of Rudyard Kipling and Michael Jackson, while the Fullerton Hotel was the main post office until 1996. Off the Fullerton, I took time to admire the intricate Cavenagh and Anderson bridges, landing conveniently on Boat Quay, a buzzy waterfront of bars and restaurants. As I walked, I snacked on a mango wafer-ice cream sandwich, topping it off with a kopi, a traditional coffee drink made from beans roasted with butter and sugar, sometimes served with rich condensed milk.

Finish off your heritage walk with some of Singapore's striking contemporary architecture: the Norman Foster-designed Supreme Court, the Esplanade Theatres or the flower-shaped ArtScience Museum, reached via the quirky



AP Photo/Wong Maye-E, File

In this May 30, 2007 file photo, fireworks are released from the Buddha tooth Relic Temple & Museum in Singapore, on the eve of Vesak Day. Singapore, which population is predominantly Buddhist, was gearing up for celebrations marking Buddha's birthday.

Helix Bridge, shaped like DNA's double-helix. The backdrop for all this is the Marina Bay Sands Hotel, one of the world's most photographed hotels. Designed to resemble three decks of cards, it's joined together at the 57th floor by a stunning SkyPark with the world's highest infinity pool, a lounge and bar. Anyone can visit the SkyPark Observation Deck for stunning 360-degree views of the harbor and skyline, but the pool is open only to hotel guests. Rooms are pricey — more than \$250 a night even in low season (summer-early fall).

Singapore is extremely clean. You're not allowed to bring gum into the country, and the U.S. State Department's travel advisory warns about physical punishment for vandalism. (I unthinkingly popped a soda open on the subway, then quickly hid it in response to other passengers' disparaging stares.) But ethnic and traditional neighborhoods are a little less sterile and more colorful than downtown streets.

Chinatown is dotted with temples and buildings attesting to the rich heritage of Malay-born Chinese who immigrated here in the 19th century. You'll see fine art deco homes on streets like Ann Siang Road. At the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple, a tooth ostensibly belonging to the Buddha is encased in a 900-pound solid-gold stupa. Little India is a jolting feast for the senses: busy shops selling anything from cell-

phones to spices, hole-in-the-wall restaurants with flavorful cuisine, mosques and colorful Hindu temples.

Singapore's "hawker centres" are something of a foodie legend. You could spend days shuttling between the biggest ones, sampling from stalls of Singaporean, Indian, Chinese, Malay and Indonesian cuisine. Seating is usually outdoors on shared benches under a canopy. Walk up to a stall and look at the pictures. Then order, pay the cashier and wait for your food (sometimes it will be brought to your table). You can buy different plates from different vendors. Don't forget fresh juices (sugar cane is a must) and desserts (mango, please!). I ate satay every day. Also great: the ubiquitous, succulent stir-fried squid with onions, scallions and shallots in a spicy tomato sauce. Most dishes cost around US\$5. Food courts in malls charge a bit more for similar fare, but with air conditioning.

Speaking of malls, Orchard Boulevard is lined with luxury shopping centers, worth a visit for people-watching if not for browsing. Istana, the presidential palace, is at Orchard Road's southern end, while the Botanical Garden is at its northern tip.

I skipped the Botanical Garden in favor of Singapore's hippest attraction, Gardens by the Bay. Adjacent to Marina Bay Sands, the park is dotted with "Supertrees" — structures as tall as 15-story buildings that function as vertical gardens, loaded with exotic plants. A spectacular sound and light show plays here twice every evening, creating a sci-fi forest.

At the Singapore Zoo, most animals live outdoors, cage-free, from penguins and crocodiles to white tigers and polar bears. A combined ticket to the zoo and nearby night safari by tram will save you some cash. Safaris sell out, so book ahead.

All in all, the mix of cultures, food, colonial heritage and modern — even futuristic — infrastructure and amenities makes the country an ideal destination. Just be sure to leave your bubblegum home.



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In this May 13, 2013 file photo, swimmers soak in a swimming pool overlooking the financial skyline in Singapore.

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