

Tipping the scales in your favor when grilling fish

James P DeWan

The Daily Meal

Like all things you've never done before, grilling fish can be ... challenging. Don't expect perfection your first time out; do expect to learn and improve with every go-round.

Why is fish hard to grill?

Fish is expensive and irritatingly easy to render inedible. Too much heat or too much time can turn those fillets from flaky to bulletproof in a New York minute.

The problem with fish is that its flesh is more delicate than sturdy land animals and therefore more susceptible to heavy-handedness. It's because fish live — and I don't think this will come as any surprise — in water. Without getting too scientific and boring, creatures that live in cold, gravity-defying liquid environments require less connective tissue as well as less (and different) fat than creatures who live on land.

But here's the thing about fat: It's largely what makes the meat juicy. Think about that well-marbled steak you had last week. Juicy as a blind item in a gossip rag, right? That's the fat. And there's more of it in beef muscle than there is in fish muscle.

Of course, fish also has water in its muscle — about three-quarters of its weight — and that water evaporates when you start heating up the fish.

Between the lack of fat and the evaporation of the water, it's pretty easy to take a beautiful piece of fish and render it drier than dry.

Hence, the single best piece



Mayo grilled salmon.

Katherine Martinelli/The Daily Meal-TNS

of advice to keep in mind when you're grilling is to keep an eye on the temperature of the fish. Remember, if it's a little underdone, you can always throw it back on the grill.

Grilling whole fish vs. fish fillets

Before I tell you how to actually grill fish, I should address the differences between grilling whole fish and fish fillets.

There are plenty of reasons to grill whole fish. For one, whole fish makes for an arresting presentation.

Furthermore, whole fish tend to be more forgiving of heat. The skin keeps the flesh from drying out and the bones — because they conduct heat

rather poorly — aid in keeping the internal temperature down. However, whole fish can be harder to come by than fillets — and more intimidating.

If you're going with fillets, go with a thick, sturdy fish like salmon, tuna or mahi mahi. They don't need to be cooked all the way through and won't fall apart when you flip them on the grill. If you like to keep the skin on, especially if you're doing something like salmon, grill your fish skin side down for most of the cooking time. After you flip them, let them go for just another minute or two. That will give you nice, crisp skin with fillets cooked to your perfect level of doneness.

If you only have skinny little fillets, but you're dying to fire up the grill, you can always

fold them in foil and place that nice little package on the grate. If you go this route, place a layer of lemon slices over the top of the fillets before you encase them in foil. It'll help keep them moist and look pretty when you serve them.

How to grill fish in 5 easy steps

1. Before you cook, clean your grill with a wire brush!!!
2. To prevent your fish from sticking to the grill, brush it on both sides with any cooking oil. Some people like mayonnaise instead of oil (see recipe below). The seasoning adheres to it nicely and it also prevents your fish from sticking to the grill. Speaking of seasoning, season your fish with salt and other spices, like pepper, Old

Bay or your own spice mix. Just remember, if your spice mix has salt, don't salt the fish separately.

3. Get your grill going to medium-high heat, then set your grill grate over the heat source so it gets nice and hot.

4. Place your oiled (or mayoed) fish onto the grill, presentation side down. The presentation side is the side you want your diners to see. With skinless fillets, the presentation side is the bone side because the skin side will still have some connective tissue attached to the flesh. That's not a big deal; it just doesn't look as nice.

If you're doing a whole fish, like red snapper or sea bass, oil it up and lay it down.

5. The rule of thumb for cooking fish is roughly 5 minutes per side for a one-inch-thick fillet. If you have a meat thermometer, use it. You want an internal temperature of about 140 degrees Fahrenheit. The flesh will be mostly opaque with just a glistening hint of translucence. Of course, the doneness level of fish is a personal decision. The more you grill fish, the more you'll understand what you like and how to achieve it.

Once your fish is done, remove it immediately to a warm serving platter and let it rest for just a few minutes. Garnish it with a squeeze of lemon, a pat of butter or anything else you think would be festive and serve it immediately. Regardless of how it turns out this time, remember what you did so that next time, it'll be even better.

MAYO GRILLED SALMON

For the most attractive presentation, skinless salmon is served bone side (as opposed to "skin side") up. Grill roughly 8 to 10 minutes total, flipping once, for 1-inch fillets. Salmon is done when an instant read thermometer registers 140F or when the interior is just becoming opaque. You can use the tip of a knife to separate flakes at the fillet's thickest part to check doneness.

Prep time: 5 minutes
Cooking time: 10 minutes
Makes 4 servings

4 (5-ounce) salmon fillets, preferably skinless
Mayonnaise as needed (about 1/4 to 1/2 cup)
Salt as needed
Pepper as needed
Freshly lemon slices as needed (optional)
Parsley, minced, as needed (optional)

1. Preheat grill. Season bone side of salmon fillets with salt and pepper.
2. Brush or spread mayonnaise in a thin layer over both sides.
3. Place fillets bone side down on grill grate directly over medium hot coals. Grill for 4 to 5 minutes, then flip and grill the other side to preferred doneness, about 4 more minutes.
4. Remove fillets to a warm platter to rest 3 to 5 minutes. While fillets rest, squeeze lemon over. Garnish fillets with optional minced parsley and serve immediately.

New book celebrates the most comforting of comfort foods

Daniel Neman

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Forget apple pie. Now, when we speak of how much something embodies the spirit of this country, we say it is as American as ... sushi?

That, as far as I can tell, is the thesis of "Food Americana," a new book by David Page celebrating the most comforting of American comfort foods.

Page is the creator of the long-running Food Network television show "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," which sends restaurateur Guy Fieri around the country to an endless assortment of mom-and-pop shops in search of great cheap regional cooking.

The book delves into the history of a number of foods we typically think of as American — fried chicken, barbecue, chicken wings, ice cream — to show where they came from and to look at in what directions they are currently evolving.

Which is where the sushi comes in. It is no surprise to learn that sushi hopped over to America from Japan after World War II, brought not as much by returning GIs as by Japanese corporate executives opening offices in this country and craving the foods of home.

Sushi restaurants opened to serve the Japanese workers; they were discovered by Americans (actor Yul Brynner was among the first to popularize them), and the sushi craze took off.

But could sushi be considered an American comfort food? Think about this: Tracey Schram, a vice president of a major sushi supplier, is quoted as saying, "When you look at the millennials, this is something that's their go-to food.

Where us, it would've been a burger and fries. For that generation, it's sushi."

The idea is similar to what Page calls "the bagelization of America."

Bagels, like sushi and pizza, came to America from other lands. At first, they were known only to people of the ethnic groups that imported them. Then other Americans discovered them, and the foods began changing to suit their taste.

Bagels became larger, softer, sweeter (part of the reason they are softer is that the mass-production machines required to feed a nation cannot handle the stiffer dough of a real bagel). And they are now being made with so many regional American ingredients and toppings that at one place in Alaska you can get reindeer sausage on a cheddar bacon bagel.

Similarly, sushi restaurants

started using less raw fish to appeal to the American palate. They also put rice on the outside to hide the seaweed many people find unappetizing and use ingredients never found in Japan, such as cream cheese.

Pizza, too, has evolved to become something uniquely American. The crust here is crisper than in its native Italy, and we use more sauce and far more toppings. But also, among higher-end pizzerias, there is a trend toward recreating the simpler pizzas of Naples, with a moist crust topped with nothing more than crushed tomatoes, mozzarella cheese and, if you want to be daring, fresh basil.

A similar movement is also going on in Chinese food, which Page also considers American ("there are more Chinese restaurants in America than all the McDonald's, Burger Kings, Wendy's and KFCs combined," he writes).

thousands of new restaurants that specialized in it.

Other hybrid Chinese recipes became standard too, with varying degrees of fidelity to

anything that is actually served in China — shrimp with lobster sauce, crab Rangoon, beef with broccoli and, eventually, General Tso's chicken.

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