



Poached cod with papaya gives a tropical twist to weeknights

By Melissa d'Arabian
The Associated Press

Balancing healthy eating with a crazy weeknight schedule is tricky for everyone. We all have competing priorities that chip away at our days: kids, careers, school, home, and family obligations all take time and energy. And next thing we know, it's 6:00pm and we haven't given any thought to dinner. What we do next is key.

If we swing by the drive-thru or order a pizza on our handy phone app every time we have a busy weeknight, our health will suffer. A better strategy: Save the pizza for true cravings and lean on a few recipes in our hip-pocket that can get us through the mealtime crunch. And then stock up on the pantry ingredients that make those recipes a breeze to pull together on a busy night.

One of those pantry items is frozen fish fillets. Yes, I love fresh fish tossed right on the grill with a tiny bit of lemon, olive oil, salt, and pepper. But I don't always have time to head to the fish counter. So, frozen fish is my plan B. I stock up on some classics like Alaskan cod and wild salmon that you can usually cook straight from

frozen — just add a few minutes to your cooking time.

Poaching is a perfect cooking method for those frozen fillets because it takes mere minutes, and leaves your fish an open canvas to showcase whatever other ingredients you might have on hand. Flavor the water with some acid and herbs (like lemon juice and fresh thyme branches) or even just a bit of white wine and some dried herbs will work in a Tuesday-night pinch.

Keep the water at a bare simmer — it should be active like club soda, not like a rolling boil. And then make a quick relish to top your fish and give it some freshness and excitement.

Today's recipe stars papaya because it's widely available this time of year, sometimes peeled and cubed if you want to pay an extra dollar or two. Papaya is full of vitamins and fiber, and raw papaya has enzymes that are celebrated for helping digestion. But feel free to swap out for another fruit (even canned peaches work) if you prefer — the tangy lime and apple cider vinegar will marry most fruit beautifully with the fish, no advanced planning required.

Poached Cod with Raw Papaya Relish

Start to finish: 15 minutes
Servings: 4

4 fillets of cod (about 4 to 5 ounces each)
1/4 cup white wine
3 cups water
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1/4 teaspoon salt

Relish:

1 1/4 cups papaya, cut into small cubes
2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
2 tablespoons lime juice
1/2 cup chopped tomatoes
2 green onions, chopped
2 tablespoons flat-leafed parsley or cilantro, chopped
2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper

Bring wine, thyme, water, and salt to a bare simmer (it should look like bubbly club soda). Place the cod in the water and keep at a bare simmer and allow to cook until the fish is cooked through, about four minutes for an average piece of fish. Remove the fish, then keep on a warm plate.

While the fish is cooking, stir together the relish ingredients in a small bowl. Spoon the relish on top of each piece of cooked fish, allowing the heat of the fish to bring out the relish flavors.

Nutrition information per serving: 179 calories (31 calories from fat); 3 g fat (1 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 61 mg cholesterol; 302 mg sodium; 8 g carbohydrate; 1 g fiber; 5 g sugar; 26 g protein.

This sweet potato and carrot dish sparkles with vinaigrette

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Starchy sides are a mainstay of the classic American dinner. It's easy to get complacent and rely on a trusty, if unimaginative, rotation of mealtime regulars: rice, potatoes, noodles.

The problem with serving essentially the same (white) thing over and over is that we are missing an opportunity to bring a variety of nutrients to the table in that starchy side. And we are missing out on the joys of new colors and flavors if we just stick to the stuff that looks and tastes remarkably similar. So why not add a few colorful and interesting options to the dinner starch repertoire?

Sweet potatoes are a great start, but also consider vegetables like peas, corn, winter squashes (such as spaghetti, acorn, and butternut), and sweet root vegetables like carrots and parsnips as potential stand-ins for rice or pasta.

One of my favorite ways to prepare these starchy sides in colder months is to toss them in a quick vinaigrette and then roast. The vinaigrette can be quite simple: even vinegar, salt and pepper, and a bit of oil will perk up the flavor.

My recipe today brings together both a starch and a root vegetable. Red-fleshed sweet potatoes (often called "yams" in American supermarkets) and carrots are tossed in a soy sauce and rice vinegar marinade, which caramelizes beautifully



in the oven.

The ingredients of the side dish marry perfectly with roasted chicken or grilled fish, or alongside spicy lentils or just a hearty salad if you are eating vegetarian.

The sweet potatoes are jam-packed with a variety of vitamins and minerals, most notably vitamins C and K and potassium. The carrots are lower calorie than the starchier sweet potato and they complement the nutrient profile with a ton of vitamin A as well as good quantities of vitamin C and potassium. The two together become a nutrition powerhouse compared to standard starches. Plus, the dinner plate just looks pretty with the gorgeous orange color.

Roasted Sweet Potato and Carrots in Quick Soy Sauce Marinade

Start to finish: 40 minutes
Servings: 4

1 medium red-flesh sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1 1/2 inch chunks (about 2 cups total)
2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1 1/2 inch chunks (about 2 cups)
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
2 teaspoons olive oil
1 small shallot, roughly chopped
2 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
1 teaspoon fresh ginger, minced or grated
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
Olive oil in a mister
Parsley for garnish, optional

Heat the oven to 400° Fahrenheit. Bring a large saucepan of water to boil over high heat, and once boiling, add the sweet potato and carrot cubes and cook just for three minutes. Drain and set aside.

Meanwhile place the soy sauce, vinegar, olive oil, shallot, garlic, ginger, and lemon juice in a blender and blend until smooth, about 30 seconds. (For chunkier marinade, just mince everything and whisk together.) Pat the sweet potato and carrot dry with a paper towel then place in bowl. Pour the vinaigrette over the cubes and toss to coat. Let marinate for 10 minutes (or up to a couple of hours), stirring at least once. Cover the bottom of a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Drain the excess marinade and discard.

Scatter the sweet potato and carrot cubes across the baking sheet. Mist lightly with olive oil (or use nonstick spray). Roast until tender, and the edges show a slight char, about 25 minutes, stirring halfway through. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

Options: Add red pepper flakes and a teaspoon of maple syrup for a sweet and spicy version, or a little sesame oil for a more Asian version, or top with cilantro, chopped green onions, and lime juice.

Nutrition information per serving: 115 calories (32 calories from fat); 4 g fat (0 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 647 mg sodium; 18 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 2 g protein.

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