

Welcome to Shop with the Chef Series 2008

Featuring Chef Andrew Cohen, Chef in Residence for MBCFM, Instructor and Consultant



Chef Andrew Cohen is well known around here, having been an avid supporter of the farmers markets long before it was ‘fashionable’ to do so. Andrew exemplifies the caliber of chef we have here in our neighborhood, with a culinary career that spans over thirty years. A graduate from the esteemed California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, Andrew interned at Chez Panise with celebrity chef and restaurant owner Alice Waters. Andrew was a Santa Cruz chef at the legendary India Joze, the Verandah, and Theo’s, all exceptional restaurants. These and other notable restaurants provided the opportunity to experiment and to broaden his repertoire. Andrew was also a chef-owner at Surf Sushi, where his outstanding sushi skills were a focal point; some of his unique creations are still on sushi menus today. On occasion, Andrew is a guest chef for Santa Cruz Mountain Vineyard, where he matches their fabulous wines to the region’s culinary bounty.

Andrew currently writes a monthly food column “Fresh Picks at the Market” for *Edible Paradise*, the e-newsletter of the MBCFM, as well as a monthly article for the food and lifestyle section of the Santa Cruz Sentinel. In addition to teaching and writing, Andrew is a personal chef for his wife and two young children (“one of my hardest audiences ever!” he says with a twinkle in his eye) and can be sighted almost every weekend at the Aptos Farmers Market shopping for his family.

BASIC FISH COOKERY

When cooking fish there are two things to remember: “Fresh!” and “Eight minutes to the inch.”

BUYING FRESH FISH

Always check fish for freshness. Smell the fish, look closely at it, and when buying whole fish, touch it. Fresh fish should smell of the sea, but never “fishy.” The flesh should be firm and the grain of the fish should be tight. If the flesh looks watery or desiccated, or if there is gapping in the grain, pass it by. Fish should be firm, not mushy. Fish are waterproof on the outside, not on the inside. Avoid fish that are “top-iced” directly on the flesh. The ice can dent the flesh and the water will soak the fish and make it soggy.

When looking at whole fish the eyes should be firm, not shriveled. The gills should have a clean look to them, and when you gently touch the side of the fish it should spring back, not leave a dent. So-this is for choosing the fish.

Now, for cooking it!

When cooking fish, remember this as a mantra: “Eight minutes to the inch.” Whether stovetop, oven, poacher, or broiler, fish cooks up in eight minutes for each inch of thickness. Roughly thereabouts. Eight minutes for the first inch, then break it down from there.

The average store bought piece of salmon runs about 1 1/2 inch thickness top to skin. This fish takes 12 minutes to cook. Fillet of sole usually runs around 1/4 - 1/2 inch. It might take only 6 minutes, but it will probably be close to 8. Keep in mind that the thinner pieces of fish are more delicate, so you don’t want to be cooking them at really high heat anyway unless you want them to disintegrate in the pan. Swordfish and tuna steaks are usually 1 inch, so cook for eight minutes. If you like your fish more well done, you may want to cook it a minute or two more.

The eight-minute to the inch rule assumes oven temps of 400°F or

..... pans over medium-high heat. If poaching, liquid is at a bare chuckle (barely rolling simmer).

Here’s an example:

SEARED SALMON WITH SALSA VERDA

2 pieces of salmon fillet, 6 oz. each, skinned.

A 10” pan heated over medium high.

(1) Season the fish with S&P, garlic powder if you wish (fresh garlic will burn- so if you use fresh you plan ahead, mince the garlic, rub it on the fish, then wipe off before cooking), and maybe a squeeze of lemon.

(2) Lay the fish into the pan skin side up. Watch as the fish changes color where it is in contact with the pan. After 8 minutes, give the pan a gentle shake and nudge the fish with a thin bladed spatula. It should slide loose. Turn the fish over, give it 4 minutes more. The fish is now done. Plate and top with the salsa verde.

(3) You can cook the fish for 4 minutes in the pan and then transfer the pan to the pre-heated 400° for 8 minutes more without turning the fish. This is my preferred salmon method. It yields a crackling crisp top and the rest is tender. Still- Eight Minutes to the inch.

(4) Give this method a try. Remember that it is guideline rather than a law. Be flexible; pay close attention the first few times, and then this technique will become second nature to you.

NOTES:

JAPANESE DRESSINGS

Amazu (Sunomono or Cucumber Salad Dressing)

1 cup rice vinegar
1 cup dashi (see miso soup recipe)
5 tablespoons sugar

Mix all ingredients like mad until sugar goes into suspension. Use amazu as base for any number of light salad dressings.

Orange Dressing

3 tablespoons amazu
3 tablespoons orange juice
Dash shoyu
Oil to emulsify

Sesame Vinaigrette

3 tablespoons amazu
Dash of shoyu
1 tablespoon sesame oil
Neutral oil to thicken

Ponzu My Way (Citrus Soy Sauce)

2 cups tangerine or orange juice
Juice of 3 limes
2 cups + 2 tablespoon soy
2/3 cup + 4 tablespoon rice vinegar
3 tablespoons mirin (Japanese cooking wine)
Handful of hana-katsuo
3 inch strip of konbu

Mix together all ingredients and let stand 24 hours. Strain through fine mesh sieve lined with cheesecloth or paper towel. Keeps 6 months in the refrigerator. Use as dipping sauce or marinade.

Tataki Sauce (My Way)

3 cups ponzu
1 medium daikon
2 large carrots
2 inch piece peeled ginger
2 cloves garlic, peeled

Chop carrots and daikon coarsely. Put in blender with plenty of water and grind to rough chop. Put in towel and rinse and squeeze until color no longer runs out tablespoon mix with ponzu.

Remove 1 cup of ponzu/vegetable mixture; put in blender with ginger and garlic and liquefy.

Add to rest of ingredients and mix. Keeps 2 weeks in refrigerator. Great as dipping sauce or marinade for rib eye steak served with wasabi butter.

MISO SOUP

7 cups water
3 x 6 inch piece of konbu, wiped with a damp cloth and scored with a sharp knife
Small handful (1/2 to 3/4 cup) hana katsuo (dried bonito flakes)
Ball of Miso the size of a tennis ball (white miso in warmer weather, 2:1 or 3:1 red miso to white miso in cold weather)
1/8 – 1/4 cup mirin (sweet Japanese cooking wine) in winter/cold weather
Tofu cubes
Wakame seaweed
Green Onions, finely sliced

Place konbu in water and bring to a boil. Boil two minutes and turn off. Sprinkle bonito flakes into the water. Do not stir. When flakes sink, Dashi (that is the name for this, the basic broth at the root of much of Japanese cookery) is now ready. Strain into clean container.

For vegetarian dashi, double the konbu, bring to a boil, reduce to medium heat and cook down by 25%, add 1 C. cold water and simmer another 10 - 15 minutes. Remove konbu.

Dashi will keep 2 - 3 days in fridge or may be frozen at this point.

Strain dashi into clean pot, get dashi hot but not boiling, and whisk miso through a strainer immersed in the broth. (Boiling will destroy many of miso's live nutrients)

Put garnishes into bowls and ladle soup over and serve immediately.

In winter, the body craves stronger and sweeter flavors. I use mirin and stronger miso. Remember that darker miso is saltier, so back off a little on the initial amount.

GREEN GARLIC JAM

1 bunch green garlic
1 medium brown onion
Thyme leaves from two sprigs
1 tablespoon olive oil or olive oil/ butter combined
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup water, white wine, white vermouth, or a combination
1 teaspoon sugar
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar (you may or may not need this)

Remove most of the greens from the garlic. Split down the length and thoroughly rinse in cold water to remove possible grit in the layers.

Finely slice into half-moons.

Split the onion through the stem and peel. Cut each half again through the stem and finely slice into quarter moons.

Heat the oil/butter over medium-high heat in a smallish, heavy pan. It's okay if things are a little crowded when the alliums go in as they will shrink quite a bit. When the oil is hot, add the thyme leaves, and as soon as you can smell them, add the garlic and the onion. Stir around to coat with the oil, turn up the heat and sauté until mixture is wilting and starting to color.

Keep this up until everything is picking up a nice color and you get some fond (the browning and bits on the bottom of the pan) in the pan-be careful not to scorch it.

Add the liquid, and reduce the heat to low. Sprinkle the sugar over all and stir. Cook at a low heat until the contents of the pan take on a thick, syrupy look – jammy.

Taste for balance. Sometimes a little vinegar will help spark the flavors, bringing out nuance. If you are curious, pull out a little of the jam and add a touch of vinegar to try. Keep it light and remember that as you cook the vinegar it will lose some of the sharpness.

If it is done, allow to cool and put into a jar that has a tight seal. If the jam seems a little dry when in the jar, add a splash of oil to the top.

Keeps a week or so.

VARIATIONS

You can just use a lot of olive oil and stew the alliums. This won't be as sweet, but the oil can be skimmed and used for cooking and vinaigrettes. If you are confident or have done this a few times, you can use extra water (for a little leeway) and put a top on the pan and simmer over very low heat while you do something else.

This is a dish that can't be made in a quantity smaller than this easily without burning. Actually, doubling it makes it easier to make, and gives you more to play with.

This is also great smeared on toasts a la tartine, pizzas, mixed into a simple cream sauce for pasta, as a topping for seared salmon or pork chops, or . . .