

Hot Smoked Salmon

http://amazingribs.com/recipes/seafood/schmancy_smoked_salmon.html

By [Meathead Goldwyn](#)

(edited for brevity and flow – some material removed – remarks added)

This recipe modernizes the ancient technique. It creates an elegant, delicate, moist piece of meat with a hint of sweet, salt, and garlic. Unlike the stuff we put on bagels, it is "hot smoked" at about 225°F.

Do not try cold smoking at home: Cold smoked salmon, cooked at low temperatures, makes Nova Scotia Lox, the stuff we love on bagels. But it is tricky to do this properly, either commercially and especially at home, because the fish is cooked at low temps where there is a high risk of pathogenic bacterial growth. In fact, any smoking under 200°F is very high risk. You cannot effectively eliminate pathogens, especially heat resistant spores, at these cooler temps, and there is even a risk of parasites like tapeworm. To properly cold smoke, your fish must be very fresh and carefully inspected by an expert, you must have precise control of the air temp, the meat temp, and use carefully measured salt quantities and curing agents. The fish must be brought up to temp in a specified manner and cooled in a specified manner. One error and someone can die. You can get a sense for how complex this is by reading what the FDA has to say.

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodScienceResearch/SafePracticesforFoodProcesses/ucm092182.htm> .

Meathead says, "I know there are home smoking websites that say cold smoking is easy and fun. Don't believe them. " Have a look at the University of Alaska publication cited below, and make up your own mind.

Meathead recommends against cold smoking in general. Read more on his well-founded opinion here, at

http://amazingribs.com/tips_and_technique/cold_smoking.html.

An excellent reference for both hot and cold smoked fish from the University of Alaska, called "Smoking Fish at Home" can be found by looking up "FNH-00325" at

<http://www.uaf.edu/files/ces/publications-db/catalog/hec/FNH-00325.pdf>

Why do we wet brine fish? If you have read much of Meathead's site you will note that he prefers dry brining to wet brining in most cases. This is an exception. Fish absorbs brines and sugar better than land animals, and in a liquid, the salt is more evenly distributed in the meat.

Fish oils get into everything Fish oils permeate anything. They can get into the scale and greasy drippings built up inside your cooker. It is a good idea to give your smoker a thorough washing after smoking fish. Another technique is, after removing the fish, give 'er all she's got Scottie and get the inside rip snorting hot to burn off any of the oil buildup. If you do a lot of fish, it might be worthwhile having a separate smoker just for fish. This is one of the few meats that I think tastes best on an electric smoker since the smoke is less intense. Pellet grills also excel at smoking fish since they, too, produce a delicate flavor.

Serving I serve it as an appetizer at room temp on a platter so people can help themselves and flake it on crackers, toast points, rye toast, apple slices, or cheese slices. It keeps well at room temp for a few hours because it is well salted.

You can make a heady variation of bagels and lox by serving it on bagel chips with cream cheese and chives. It is also wonderful on top of small boiled potatoes, sliced in half, topped with sour cream, and then the salmon. Try it on a toast point with a dollop of horseradish cream sauce or minced hard boiled egg. Another wonderful use is to mix it in with scrambled eggs, omelets, or in risotto. It also makes a fine sandwich. Put it in a bowl and flake it with a fork, add a very tiny splash of sesame oil and some mayo. Go easy on mayo. Makes a fine sammie on rye.

Another option is to put a sweet glaze on the fish. Because it is both sweet and salty, this variation really shines if served straight on crackers or toast. Or use my pastrami rub instead and make salmon pastrami.

Occasionally I have some left over. Only occasionally. If it is tightly packaged in plastic wrap and then foil, it can be refrigerated for up to a week or frozen for a month or so.

Recipe: Makes 4 hunks about 1/2 pound each. It takes about 20 minutes to make the brine, and up to 3 hours for brining depending on how thick the meat is. Preparing the fish for the smoker takes about 15 minutes and cooking takes 60 to 90 minutes. Accompanying drinks: Crisp, high acid, dry white wine is the classic. French Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc based wines such as Chablis or white Burgundies (Chardonnay); or White Bordeaux or Pouilly Fume (both Sauvignon Blanc) are classics. Champagne is also a winner.

Ingredients

- 2 pounds of fresh salmon fillets of similar thickness, scales removed, skin on, cut into strips about 3" wide
- 1/2 cup hot water in a 1 cup measuring cup
- 1/4 pound salt, any type (but you don't need a scale, I'll explain below)
- 1/4 cup granulated white sugar
- 2 tablespoons of garlic powder (not garlic salt)
- 2 tablespoons finely ground black pepper
- 1/2 gallon cold water
- 1 clean brown paper bag or a few sheets of unused paper

Sugar. Wood. If you are diabetic, you can skip the sugar, although truth be told, very little actually gets into the meat. Alder, apple, peach, or other fruitwood chips or pellets are my favorite woods. Avoid hickory or mesquite; they are too strong. As always too much smoke is worse than too little. On a charcoal grill or smoker or an electric smoker, 4 ounces of wood will probably be enough. On a gas grill, double it.

Beware. Do not leave the fish in brine longer than 3 hours. If the filets are thin, brine for less time. And do not overcook.

Optional: glazing the salmon. Sometimes I like to put a sweet glaze on the fish, especially if it is being served straight. To make a glaze, simply crumble about 2 tablespoons of brown sugar on each chunk. It will melt in the heat of your smoker. You can use more or less brown sugar on the glaze if you wish, or even try maple syrup.

Method

- 1) Run your fingers over the flesh of the fish and make sure all the pin bones are gone. If not, drape the fish over the edge of a bowl so the bones stick out, and yank them with tweezers or needle-nose pliers. Don't worry if there are a few scales left on the skin. You will be removing the skin. Sometimes the lining of the belly of the fish has a milky membrane on it. With a sharp filleting knife, remove it. It will get leathery when you cook. Cut the meat into strips about 3" wide.
- 2) Chose your brining container carefully. It needs to be food grade, large enough to hold the meat and the brine with the meat submerged, and it cannot be made of aluminum, copper, or cast iron, all of which can react with the salt. Do not use garbage bags or a garbage can or a bucket from Home Depot. They are not food grade. Do not use a Styrofoam cooler. It might give the meat an off flavor and you'll never get the cooler clean when you're done. Zipper bags work fine. For large cuts get Reynolds Brining Bags, Ziploc XL, and XXL bags.

You can make the brine days in advance and keep it chilled if you wish. Start by adding 1/2 cup hot water to a one cup measuring cup. Then pour in salt, any salt, until the water line reaches 3/4 cup. The water will swallow up almost exactly 1/4 pound regardless of whether you use table salt, kosher salt, pickling salt, or sea salt. The volume of these salts may differ, but their water displacement will be the same! Pour the slurry into a very clean non-reactive container large enough to hold the meat and a bit more than 1/2 gallon of water. Then add 1/2 gallon of cold water. Then add the sugar, garlic, and black pepper. Stir until most of the sugar is dissolved. The garlic and pepper will not dissolve much at first.

If you are using a pan, submerge the fish skin side up in the brine and refrigerate. Make sure the meat part is thoroughly submerged. If you need to, hold it under with a plate with a weight on top. Cover with plastic wrap not aluminum foil. Gently stir the container occasionally to make sure all parts of the fish come into contact with the brine.

If you brine in a zipper bag, periodically grab the bag and squish things around and flip the meat so the brine can get in from all sides. Place the bag in a pan to catch leaks.

- 3) The **length of brining** will vary depending on how thick the filets are. Brine 2" thick filets for about 2 hours in the fridge, 1" filets for 1 hour. Drain the fish and discard the brine. Then rinse the fish to remove excess surface salt. Pat dry with paper towels. Some folks like to put the filets in the fridge for an up to 3 hours so that a shiny tacky film or pellicle will form on the surface. It is said to help retain moisture and smoke. I have tried it with and without pellicle and see no quality difference. But a few hours of resting will help the brine to distribute itself evenly through the flesh.
- 4) Cut pieces of paper bag or plain white paper about the same size as each hunk of fish and place the fish on the paper, skin side down. Don't use foil or parchment paper. We want the fish to stick to the paper to help us remove the skin, and it will not stick to foil or parchment. If you are glazing, sprinkle some brown sugar on top of the fillets or paint them with maple syrup. Place the fish on a rack on your grill or smoker so they are not touching each other.
- 5) Set up the grill in a 2-zone configuration or get the smoker started, and get the indirect zone up to about **225°F**. Put the fish in and add the wood.
- 6) Start spot checking the meat temps after about 30 minutes. As the meat approaches doneness, droplets of milky liquid will often come to the surface. Some cooks call the boogers, but they are actually a protein liquid called albumin from within the muscle fibers. It just looks gross, but it's OK. You can wipe it off or brush it off with a wet brush if you want. **Remove the meat when it is at about 140°F internal. No more than 150°F. Total cooking time will be about 60 minutes** depending on the actual temperature of your oven and the thickness of the meat.
- 7) Remove the fillets and let them cool for about 15 minutes, until you can handle them. Then peel off the paper and the skins should come right off with it. While you are looking at the skin side, if there is any dark brown flesh, scrape it off with a serrated steak knife and discard it. It can taste muddy.

N.B. You will note that there are several cold-smoked recipes and cold-smoking-related material collected on our SausagesWest.com website, and that some of them contain conflicting advice. In particular, we note Meathead's admonition against cold smoking fish. However, quite a few of our readers enjoy sport fishing and preserving/processing fish, salmon in particular. The University of Alaska publication cited above discourages cold smoking, yet gives full instructions on how to do it.

Both Meathead's and the U of A articles present excellent cautionary tips on salmon smoking, and are cited for completeness. We find that the recipes and ideas found on AmazingRibs.com are without exception well-reasoned, although we are not above telling you that we sometimes differ as to opinion and content detail. Please accept this as useful reference material. We believe that our readers deserve to be well-informed and, like Meathead, prefer that we all err on the side of caution as concerns food preparation.

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