

Black cod with miso

Serves: 4

Preparation time: 15 mins

Marinating time: 1 hour – 3 days

Cooking time: 15 mins



Ingredients:

150 ml (5 US fl oz) rice wine

75 ml (2½ US fl oz) dark soy sauce

75 ml (2½ US fl oz) light soy sauce

75 ml (2½ US fl oz) rice vinegar

75 ml (2½ US fl oz) water

200g (1 cup) sugar

1 tsp sesame oil

1 tsp chilli oil

2 little chillis (green or red), sliced, leaving seeds in

4 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced

2" piece fresh ginger, peeled and sliced

250g (9 oz) white miso paste ('shiro miso')

approx 700g (1½ lb) black cod fillet(s)

dash of groundnut oil

spring onion slices and pickled ginger and/or lemon wedges to garnish

Method:

1. First, make the marinade: In a small saucepan combine all the ingredients except the miso, fish, groundnut oil and garnish. Very slowly bring to a boil to allow sugar to dissolve and flavours to combine. Simmer for 2 mins.
2. Add miso to the pan and stir over a low heat to fully combine. Don't let it boil or you'll kill the friendly bacteria. Your marinade should be a smooth soup-like consistency. Then let it cool completely.
3. Meanwhile, wash and dry the fish. Check for bones. Leave the skin on.
4. In a dish cover the fish with the cooled marinade and leave for at least an hour. The longer the better. If leaving for more than an hour, refrigerate.
5. When it is time to cook, bring the fish to room temperature and preheat the oven to as hot as it will go. 260 C (500 F) or above is best. Preheat a roasting tin in the oven.

6. Remove fish from marinade and scrape off any bits of chilli, garlic or ginger but do not rinse. Reserve the marinade. Line the roasting tin with a little groundnut oil and lay on the fish, skin side down. Roast for 10-15 mins. (Fish takes 8-10 mins per inch of thickness.) Be careful not to over-cook. You want it only just opaque and starting to flake, and still very moist.
7. Meanwhile make the sauce and prepare the garnish. Pour marinade into a pan, leaving the bits of chilli, garlic and ginger behind, and gently heat.
8. The black cod can be served on its own with just the sauce and garnish as it is so rich. For a heartier meal, good side dishes would be rice and some bright green stir-fried bok choy.



Typically the marinade for this dish would just consist of mirin, sake (both types of Japanese rice wine), miso and sugar. I tried making it just like this. I also it tried with lots of soy sauce and aromatics but no miso. And I tried it again with everything, and liked this third way best. For me the traditional recipe is a little too sweet and cloying. The dish is supposed to be rich and savoury but also benefits from the sharpness of the soy sauce, the aromatic flavours of the garlic and ginger, and the heat of the chilli.

Don't worry if you don't have all the ingredients listed for the marinade. All three ways we tried it were delicious. I think rice wine (mirin, sake and Chinese versions all taste different but all work) and sugar are essential. Then add soy sauce and/or miso, and the aromatics if you have them.

Black cod facts:

- Black Cod is not related to the true Cod; it's from another family of fish altogether. It's also called Sablefish and Butterfish, or rather Sablefish and Butterfish are also called Black Cod. Fish are notoriously mislabelled, or sold by more than one name – it's very confusing.
- You could use fat fillets of any buttery, flaky white fish instead, maybe Halibut, Haddock, Bass or Pacific Cod. Apparently Nigella uses Salmon.
- Don't use Atlantic Cod as there aren't many left.
- The real Black Cod comes from very cold waters in the Southern hemisphere. It can live in such cold places because its blood contains a natural antifreeze. Special antifreeze proteins cling to little ice crystals in the blood and prevent them growing and killing the fish.

Miso facts:

- Miso is Japanese fermented soybean paste. It looks like peanut butter and smells bad. But don't let this put you off. It adds an intense and savoury depth and complexity to many dishes.
- It is high in 'umami' – the fifth (and best) basic taste, after sweetness, saltiness, bitterness and sourness. Other umami-rich foods are Parmesan, soy sauce, fish sauce, mushrooms, tomatoes and some meats. They are all high in tasty glutamates (as in monosodium glutamate, which occurs naturally in seaweed and was isolated and developed as a food additive back in 1907).
- It's good for you too, as it's very tasty, yet low in calories, and also full of protein, beneficial bacteria and B vitamins.
- Traditionally rural Japanese families would make their own miso each year after the grain harvest. It is made by injecting ground, cooked soybeans with a special mould cultivated in rice, barley or soybeans. It is then mixed with water and salt and allowed to ferment for anything between several weeks and several years. The longer the better. I suggest you buy yours from a shop. Look in the refrigerated section of a large supermarket, healthfood store or Asian food shop. It should contain just soybeans, water, salt and a grain, ie no additives.
- There are all sorts of misos, ranging in colours, textures and flavours, with different uses. If you have some left in the packet, keep it in the fridge (for up to a year) so you can try using a little to enhance the flavour of soups, sauces, vinaigrettes and dips. It's apparently excellent in tomato sauce.

