

Salmon baked in fig leaves with nasturtium butter

This recipe is based on one from the Chez Panisse Café cookbook, a restaurant where I did a stint and learnt a tonne. I was inspired to make it for a dinner in honour of Chez Panisse's 40th birthday by the astounding number of nasturtium flowers and fig leaves in my garden in early September this year.



I served it with some braised Umbrian lentils and bright rainbow chard. You could add some fresh pink peppercorns and/or capers (both drained and rinsed well) to the butter if you like for extra zing.

Serves: 8

8 fillets of good salmon, pin-bones removed but skin left on, about 180g each

8 fresh, large fig leaves, washed and dried and stalks removed

olive oil

approx 40 nasturtium flowers, stems and bugs removed

125g unsalted butter, softened

1 medium shallot

1 large unwaxed lemon

1 tsp red wine vinegar

coarse salt and black pepper

1. Rub the salmon with olive oil and season with salt and pepper all over. Lay out the fig leaves, shiny side down, and put a salmon fillet on each, skin side down. Wrap the leaves as neatly and securely as you can around the salmon and place each package in a roasting tin. This step can be done an hour or two in advance if you like. Leave the salmon in the fridge until half an hour before you want to cook it.
2. Finely chop the nasturtiums and mash them together with the soft butter using a fork. Use a microplane or fine cheese grater to grate in the zest from half of the lemon.
3. Peel the shallot and dice it as small as you can. Place it in a cup with the juice of half of the lemon, a scant teaspoon of red wine vinegar and a pinch of salt. Leave to macerate for half an hour or so.
4. Now mash the shallot and its juice into the butter. Taste and season with salt and pepper, adding more lemon juice or zest if you think it needs it. It should taste quite peppery and lemony. Place the butter on some clingfilm and pat it into a sausage shape. Wrap it tightly in the clingfilm and store in the fridge until half an hour before it will be time to serve. If you like, make the butter in advance and keep it in the fridge or freezer. Bring it to cool room temperature before using.
5. To cook: Heat the oven to 200C with a rack in the middle. Bake the salmon for 10-12 minutes (depending on the thickness of the fillets) until they are almost cooked through, so with a small area slightly rare in the very centre. You may want to carefully poke into one with the tip of a paring knife to have a look. Plate the salmon fillets, partially unwrap the fig leaves so you can see the pink salmon inside, and top with a generous slice of the nasturtium butter. Serve immediately.