



Grilled Black Sea Bass

Black Sea Bass is a mid-Atlantic species steadily making its way north as the Gulf of Maine continues to warm faster than 99% of the oceans on the planet. Why? They follow the food and the habitat conditions that support that food. In class we talk about how changing climates affect species migration, predator-prey relationships and ecosystem impacts. For the past 15-20 years, black sea bass have shown up in ever greater numbers, and scientists are beginning to get a handle on the implications. Ask lobster harvesters what they think about pulling up a trap baited for lobster that is full of sea bass. You're likely to get a few choice words. While there is a growing commercial fishery for sea bass, they are rocking ecosystem balance because they chow down the baby lobsters that juvenile cod (a stressed population in the Gulf of Maine) depend on to grow. And they represent about \$8 million industry, compared to nearly half a billion dollars for lobster.

So, what's the solution? EAT 'EM! They're delicious and take a fairly simple preparation. You generally find them whole, and they're easy to cook that way. You can roast them in the oven with seasoning on the inside and outside of the cavity. The keys are to be sure not to let them dry out. So be sure to butter or oil them and do not overcook.

Ingredients

- 1 2 to 4 pound whole black sea bass
- 1 teaspoon salt (tip: combine mineral and smoked salt)
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1/2 lemon, sliced thinly and quartered
- several sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon butter (You can add a little more. Alternately, you can use extra virgin olive oil)
- 1/2 teaspoon minced garlic

Directions

1. Make a couple of VERY shallow cross-hatch slits along the outside skin of the flesh. You just want to score the skin to allow the flesh to heat evenly. Don't cut too deep.
2. Mix salt, pepper and red pepper flakes together and rub along the inside cavity and on the outside of the fish.
3. Mix butter and garlic into a paste and rub along the inside cavity and outside of the fish.
4. Tuck 3-5 thin lemon slices and several thyme sprigs into the cavity. You don't need to over-stuff.
5. Let that sit while the grill heats up. Once the grill is properly pre-heated, season it with whatever you normally do (I wipe on grapeseed oil). I use charcoal, and I want the heat to be around 350 degrees.
6. Gently lay the fish down on the grill. Let it cook on that side for 4-6 minutes. Gently flip it and cook for another 4-6 minutes. Depending on the size of the fish, it may be close to done. You can tell by the firmness. You want the flesh to give just a bit. Remember, you can always cook it more, but you can't cook it less!
7. If it's a bigger fish, say more than 4 pounds, remove the fish from the direct heat and let cook for a couple of minutes longer, lid closed.
8. Serve the fish by taking a thin spatula or a knife and gently lifting the flesh directly off the bone. Once you've finished one side, pull the head and spine off and eat the other side.