

Geek's Teriyaki Salmon with Mussels

You might ask what I, a geek extraordinaire, knows about cooking. I have to admit, when I look at some of my fellow computer professionals and think about them with a pan of boiling water or around a hot stove, I shudder. Anyway, when my wife of 32 years and I were first married, she did the cooking. Her favorite was spaghetti and, being the snoop that I am, I couldn't help but look over her shoulder.

Soon I was suggesting spices and as she (the genius she is) backed away from the stove (which is better than backing into it in nothing but an apron, but that is a different story) I kind of took over.

Running your own business means my usual day is at least 12 hours and that doesn't leave a lot of time for other activities, so I have found ways to make cooking quicker without losing its appeal. While a pre-made pizza you unwrap and shove into the oven for 20 minutes meets the letter of a twenty-minute meal it lacks a certain amount of finesse.

I love to grill. I grill steaks, chops, chicken, shrimp and especially salmon. In my humble opinion salmon has to rank as one of the top fish in the world. It keeps its flavor with various sauces, (be nice and maybe sometime I will share a great dill sauce I stumbled on to) keeps moist, is easy to fix, and above all, it has few small annoying bones to contend with. So this twenty-minute meal will involve one of my favorite recipes for salmon, teriyaki salmon with mussels and fettuccini.

My kitchen is set up with a four-burner gas stove with an over/under double oven. Immediately to the side of the stove is the counter that L's into the double sink and, directly behind you as you face the stove, are the sliding doors out to the deck where the gas-grill sits.

If your arrangement isn't as user friendly (to use geekese) then you may need to adjust your cooking times accordingly to allow for the trips out to the grill. Of course, you can broil the fish if you have a boiler in your oven but it never seems to turn out as moist as on the grill.

In order to cook quickly you will need to have the ingredients laid out and ready for you to start. Usually this takes about 5-10 minutes depending on how well organized your kitchen is. I prefer stainless steel pans such as Farberware, aluminum can add a metallic taste unless it is the nonstick variety.

First the ingredients:

The Fish: 4 8 – 12 oz Salmon Fillets, skin on (fresh preferred) these should be about the size of your hand (slightly larger for the small boned females in the audience) and about an inch thick at their thickest point.

Fresh fish won't have a strong odor and will be firm to the touch. If it has a strong smell and is mushy, it isn't fresh!

The Teriyaki Sauce:

1/3 cup Soy sauce (I usually use Kikkoman)

2/3 cups dry red wine (Zinfandel or Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford Hill is an excellent choice)

1 tablespoon garlic salt

½ teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

2 tablespoons olive oil (extra virgin)

The Mussels:

3 pd Mussels

2 cups water

The Pasta:

Fettuccini (I use the kind with roasted garlic embedded, made by Ronzoni)

1 green, red and yellow bell pepper (medium sized)

3 Portobello mushroom crowns (medium to large size)

1 sweet onion (such as a Vidalia) medium to large size

2 tablespoons premixed Italian spices (or the equivalent in individual Oregano, Basil, Rosemary and Thyme)

½ cup white wine (I like Pinot Grigio imported from Italy, it usually has a better flavor, such as Mezza Corona)

4 large cloves garlic, minced (or 2 tablespoons of pre-minced garlic from the store)

The tools:

A shallow flat pan (such as a 34x22x4cm Pyrex) or 1 gallon zip-lock bag (for marinating the fish)

A large stew pot with lid (8 qt size)(for steaming the mussels)

A steamer basket (the kind for vegetables works fine)

A large saucepan (2 qt)(for boiling the fettuccini)

A large skillet with lid (I use an 18" Wearever)(for the sauté)

A fish grilling basket (not required, but much less messy than straight on the grill)

A grill (gas if you are going to make the 20 minutes, otherwise add the charcoal prep time)

A whisk and a medium sized mixing bowl (to make the sauce)

Optional:

A medium shallot

The juice from ½ of a fresh lemon

The Instructions

Let's get started, t-minus 20 minutes and counting. Since the fish should marinate for ten minutes, you must first fix the teriyaki sauce. You can buy the pre-made stuff, but it lacks that certain zing of the homemade variety. In the medium-mixing bowl, mix the 1/3 cup soy sauce with the 2/3 cup red wine, (you can adjust the ratios between soy and wine to your own tastes, but this works well) 2 tablespoons of garlic salt, olive oil and cracked pepper, whisk until thoroughly mixed. If you have more time, finely chop a medium shallot and add it to the sauce.

Place the salmon fillets either skin-down in the shallow pan or into the gallon zip-lock. Pour the teriyaki sauce over the fillets and let stand (of course, seal the zip-lock if you used one.) Periodically (about every two minutes) turn the fillets in between steps (this is why I like zip-locks over a shallow pan, it is much easier to turn the fillets as a whole instead of individually.)

T-minus 15 minutes and counting If you aren't using a fish grilling basket make sure the grill is clean and spray it with a non-stick coating spray such as Pam. Start the grill on high and let it warm.

Place the 2 cups of water and the steaming basket in the stew pot and place it on the stove on high.

Fill the large saucepan to $\frac{3}{4}$ full of water and place on the stove on high. See why four burners are nice to have? (Don't forget to turn the fillets) Next, rinse the mussels in fresh water (i.e. tap water unless you happen to live in Phoenix...), remove any beards and discard any that appear dead or have broken shells. Drop the remaining mussels into the stew pot and close the lid. Once the mussel pot begins to boil turn heat down to between medium and low.

Note: When storing mussels don't place them in the freezer, keep them in the upper section of the refrigerator, if you kill them (yes, you buy them live) you shouldn't cook them. Live ones will be tightly closed and will open when cooked. Discard any that aren't open after cooking. (Don't forget to turn the fillets)

Now chop the onion, peppers and mushrooms. I usually remove the dark brown areas that contain the mushroom spores on the mushrooms so they don't add a real earthy flavor.

Place a thin layer of olive oil in the bottom of the large fry pan (just enough to cover it) and sauté the veggies over medium heat. You may need to add additional oil but keep it to a minimum as the veggies sauté. Season the sauté with the premixed Italian spices and chopped garlic. Salt and pepper to taste.

You can use a wooden spoon to turn the veggies or a spatula; I like to use the slide-flip technique where you shake the sauté pan forward with a slight upward motion at the end of the forward slide. Usually about 4-5 of these motions turns the mixture nicely. Be careful if you try this, this stuff is hot!

T-minus ten minutes and counting Once the veggies are sautéing nicely, place the salmon fillets in the grilling basket and place them flesh side down on the grill (this should start when there is 10-15 minutes left.) Turn the heat down (if on gas grill) to medium. If using charcoal. Raise the grill to reduce the heat. Let the fillets cook this way for about 2-3 minutes, then turn them skin side down. Use of a fish-grilling basket makes this step much easier, believe me! Periodically baste them with the sauce left in the pan or bag.

About this time the pasta water should be boiling, I usually put a small bit of olive oil into the water to help keep the pasta from sticking together, but you don't have to. Take out enough fettuccini to serve four (for me this is as much as will fit in the circle made by your thumb and index finger, a 1½ inch diameter circle, adjust for smaller or larger hands) and place it in the boiling water. I usually break it into two parts, but if you like long chunks of hot pasta slapping you in the chin, leave it long. (Don't forget to turn the fillets...)

About now the veggies should be done, turn up the heat and add the white wine. Let it simmer for a while (about 2-3 minutes). If you like, add the juice from half of a fresh lemon, but this isn't required.

By now the fettuccini should be done, drain it and add it to the sauté and turn the heat down to low. Test the fettuccini by taking a piece and tasting it, if it is slightly firm, but not starchy it is ready. Add the mussels to the sauté or place them in a separate bowl. Make sure to turn off all burners except the one still warming the sauté. Check the salmon, when it flakes easily with a fork it is done.

Turn off the grill, or, with charcoal, remove the fish from the grill. If you used a basket, I found the easiest way to remove the fish is to, before you open the basket, gently separate the fish on the flesh side from the basket wires using a knife flat side down, then open the basket and use a spatula to gently separate the filet meat from the skin which will stick to the basket. Place the fillets on a serving platter.

T-minus 0, Blast off! Place the sauté and pasta into a serving dish and place the fish, sauté, and mussels on the table. Serve with the rest of the Pinot Grigio, Bon Appetite!

About the author: Michael R. Ault is a recognized expert in the Oracle Database system and an author of several Oracle and computer related books. Mike's articles have appeared in Oracle magazine, Oracle Internals Magazine, DM Review and numerous other periodicals. Mike is also a frequent presenter at computer conferences worldwide.