WILL MEYRICK

INDONESIA

SALT-GRILLED SNAPPER WITH SAMBAL MATAH

Salt-grilled snapper with sambal matah: a whole fish stuffed with lemon basil and lemongrass, crusted in coarse salt and grilled over charcoal, topped with a raw Balinese shallot sambal. The salt seals in the juices.



SERVES	PREP	COOK	TOTAL	DIFFICULTY	SPICE
2	25 min	25 min	50 min	Medium	Medium

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE FISH

1 whole snapper (about 800 g), scaled and gutted

1 small bunch lemon basil

2 lemongrass stalks, bruised

300 g coarse sea salt

Lemon or lime wedges, to serve

FOR THE SAMBAL MATAH

6 shallots, thinly sliced

3 lemongrass stalks, tender part only, finely sliced

3 red chillies, sliced

1 tsp shrimp paste

1 tsp finely sliced torch ginger flower (bongkot), optional

1 small tomato, diced

80 ml vegetable or coconut oil

Juice of 1 lime or lemon

Salt, to taste

METHOD

PREPARE THE FISH

1. Stuff the belly of the snapper with the lemon basil and bruised lemongrass. Rub the coarse salt firmly into the scales, so it clings and forms a crust.

GRILL

2 Get a charcoal grill hot and fan the coals. Place the fish in a fish clamp, which makes it easier to turn without knocking off the salt.

3 Grill for 10 to 12 minutes on each side, until the crust is set, the scales have lifted and the flesh is just cooked.

MAKE THE SAMBAL MATAH

4 Mix the shallots, lemongrass, chillies and shrimp paste in a bowl. Squeeze in the lime or lemon juice.

5 Heat the oil until very hot. Pour it over the shallot mixture. It should sizzle, which sears the shallots. Stir in the torch ginger flower and tomato and season with salt.

SERVE

6 Brush off most of the salt crust, which would otherwise make the fish too salty. Cut along the fish and peel back the skin.

7 Spoon the sambal matah over and serve with a wedge of lemon or lime.

USEFUL SHORTCUTS FOR HOME COOKS

No charcoal: bake the salt-crusted fish at 220 C for 25 to 30 minutes, then brush off the salt.

Any whole white fish works. Ask the fishmonger to scale and gut it and leave the scales on.

The oil must be very hot or the shallots stay raw and sharp. Coconut oil gives a more Balinese flavour.

Will is on the east coast of Bali, staying by the ocean, and starts by trying his luck at fishing with no result. The area is known for its salt farms, so he cooks a salt-crusted snapper over charcoal with local salt.He says it is not really Balinese, since he has added a European twist, and that sambal matah keeps...