

'Silli Salmon

Salmon is an anadromous fish hatched in fresh water, migrating out to the salt water ocean for 1-5 years until sexual maturity whereupon it migrates back to the same fresh water river from which it was born in order to spawn. Salmon do this using an extraordinary sense of smell. They live in cold waters in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Salmon are also extensively farmed but the meat is much more pale and less tasty because the wild salmon feed on krill rather than manufactured food meal made of ground-up "forage fish". After spawning, the salmon experience extremely rapid aging as a result of massive release of corticosteroids and die. Salmon meat is very high in oil rich in Omega-3 fatty acid, significantly less in farmed fish due to the artificial feed. It is also rich in protein and Vitamin D. It is amenable to very many methods of preparation from raw (sushi or sashimi) to smoked (put quality Alaska smoked salmon on your bucket list).

I chose fusilli pasta for this dish because I like the texture and it has a lot of surface area to which the sauce can cling. Any pasta would do, even linguini for a smoother bite. However...

- 2 cups fusilli (adjust per appetite)
- 1 medium Pacific salmon fillet, boneless and skinless (or slice off the skin and fry later for some salmon bacon)
- 2 shallots, disced
- 2 knuckles garlic, smashed and chopped
- 1 orange (blood orange for a little extra sweetness)
- 1 lemon
- 1 tsp ginger powder
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon
- white wine (you will be drinking this with the meal, too)
- 1/4 cream or half-and-half
- capers
- butter
- olive oil
- fresh parsley
- 1 avocado
- 1 cucumber

Bring salted water to boil, sufficient for the pasta. Do not add olive oil to the water or the sauce won't adhere to the pasta. Boil until *el dente*. Remove and drain, saving a ladle or two of the water.

Bring saucepan to medium-high heat. Thoroughly coat pan with a generous amount of butter. Add the shallots and the garlic and sautee until the shallots just go translucent. Add the salmon. While the bottom is searing, squeeze the juice of half the lemon over, then the juice of half the orange. Sprinkle about 1/4 of the mixed dry spices over. Flip after 2-3 minutes (depending on the size of the fish) and repeat the process. When both sides have a good sear, remove the salmon and cut off 4 nice thick(ish) slices and set aside. Deglaze pan with white wine and let the alcohol cook out, then stir in the cream. Add remaining dry spices and 1/2-2/3 of the pasta water then turn down heat to a simmer and let reduce slightly to thicken, stirring constantly. When sauce just begins to reduce, return the large portion of the salmon and with a wooden spoon coarsely mash the meat into small chunks and stir into sauce. Spoon in some capers to taste. Let simmer for a few minutes until fish is just cooked through. Add the cooked pasta and gently fold everything together until pasta is thoroughly coated with sauce.

Using a slotted spoon, divide the pasta onto 2 plates in equal portion, in a flattened mound. Lay two slices of the salmon diagonally on top, then spoon over a little of the remaining sauce from the pan. Zest a bit of the orange over the top, then sprinkle with fresh chopped parsley for a little color.

Serve each with 1/2 of the avocado sliced lengthwise, with each slice interspersed with peeled sliced cucumber also sliced lengthwise in about the same length as the avocado. Drizzle with a dressing of choice or just go nekkid.

Pair with a chilled crisp white wine like a short barrel aged Chardonnay from a vineyard on the shady side of a hill, a Pinot Gris/Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc, or dry Moscato. Rose' or blush wines like Grenache or Mourvedre would also work nicely (A Grenache with this salmon dish and watermelon chunks is a delightful provincial-style "cucina rustica" meal). Since I am partial to Pacific salmon I recommend a California label wine, and all of the varietals mentioned previously are produced here. The Santa Cruz Mountains have a number of superb vintages released in limited quantities - it's our own quasi-secret blessing of oenological riches.

A sharp apple cider, hefeweizen, or blonde ale would also pair well.

For some island flair you could add some chopped papaya to the pasta.

For dessert, serve honeydew chunks with a sharp parmesan cheese.

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