

A New Way to Use Whey

Make your own cheese, but don't toss the whey—cook it down into a smooth, rich caramel.

See B2



Potato Salad, Minus the Mayo

7 other ways to dress this backyard barbecue favorite.

See B2

FOOD

THE EPOCH TIMES



AUDREY LE GOFF

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Warm, slightly sweet sabayon is a great dairy-free alternative to whipped cream on top of juicy seasonal fruits.

Simple Sabayon

To make this delicate French sauce, all you need are 3 ingredients, gentle heat, and a lot of whisking

AUDREY LE GOFF

If you're looking for a new companion for your summer berries, search no further than sabayon. An Italian import adopted by the French, sabayon is a delicate, frothy custard, made with just three ingredients: egg yolks, sugar, and wine. Rapidly whisked together over a bain-marie, the mixture transforms into an

airy sauce. Light and subtly sweet, it's a great dairy-free alternative to whipped cream, perfect for spooning over juicy seasonal fruits.

You can use an electric hand mixer, or go the manual route—as long as you're prepared for a workout.

The original Italian zabaione—sometimes spelled zabaglione—is made with Marsala, a brandy-fortified wine—15 to 20 percent ABV—produced in the

city of Marsala in Sicily. Though reports vary, the recipe is said to date back to the 15th century, when it was enjoyed all throughout Northern Italy. The story goes that it was Catherine de' Medici's chefs who imported zabaione to the royal court of France, when she married King Henry II and became queen in 1547.

French sabayon traditionally swaps the Marsala for a classic white wine—10 to 15 percent ABV—be it dry, sweet, or even sparkling, like Champagne. It's thus slightly less boozy, a little airier, and subtler in flavor.

In modern France, sabayon can refer to either a savory or sweet custard. The savory version, made with white wine, egg yolks, lemon juice, and a pinch of salt, is often used as a frothy sauce to accompany delicate scallops or oysters.

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The deep persimmon color of fresh salmon is one of nature's finest hues.

In Salmon, the Story of Alaska

ERIC LUCAS

"Standing dead," Don Honea tells me. He laughs—Native humor is very dry—because he is standing, clearly not dead, in the dim light of a Yukon River salmon smokeshack, holding up a five-foot cottonwood log that is indeed dead. It's the only wood they cut to smoke their salmon catch, and the gnarled, musty aroma of generations of cottonwood fires seeps from the pores of the smokeshack timbers and varnishes the tin siding. The precision of Honea's smoke-wood prescription reflects not just how deeply held this tradition is, but how important salmon is in the vast natural empire known as Alaska.

But while Honea has a concrete answer regarding the best wood, he sidesteps a perennial debate about which salmon is best. Alaska has five kinds: king, silver, sockeye, pink, chum; all have their virtues and fans, and this is their global homeland.

I believe that salmon went to places and people followed them knowing that if salmon were there, they could make a life there.

Melanie Brown, fisherman

The Honea family has operated a summer salmon camp on the Yukon, upriver from the tiny village of Ruby at a spot called Big Eddy, for generations—maybe for millennia, as Interior Alaska's Athabaskan people have been here since time immemorial. Human life has thrived along the salmon-bearing inlets and riverways of the North Pacific for more than 10,000 years.

Each summer and fall, the fish return, billions of them, fat and large, from the ocean and migrate upstream to ancestral spawning grounds. Brawny and inexorable, the fish match the rivers they swim. Spinning in the clear amber waters, they are an evocative sight in their vermilion and chartreuse spawning coats, nature's expressionist canvas.

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In Salmon, the Story of Alaska

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And each year, this return has fed countless harvesters for the winter ahead. Not just humans: Bears, eagles, and seals all rely on salmon, as does the forest itself, fertilized by the fish carcasses the animals discard.

The world's largest remaining single salmon run, ranging from 30 to 62 million fish a year, is in Bristol Bay, southwest of Anchorage in the Bering Sea. Here, salmon allowed people to survive crises, even in modern times.

"I believe that salmon went to places and people followed them knowing that if salmon were there, they could make a life there," said Melanie Brown, a Bristol Bay fisherman of Yupik/Inupiaq ancestry. She works a permit area established by her great-grandfather in the early 20th century. While the region's Native population was decimated by the 1918 flu pandemic, her ancestors made it through with salmon, which isn't only high-calorie but high in wellness benefits. Brown spent some of her downtime during this pandemic making a video for Slow Food USA about her great-grandmother's fish-head stew recipe.

"For me, I truly believe that I would not be here today if not for salmon, and how they provided for my great-grandparents after they were orphaned in the 1918 flu," said Brown.

David Montgomery, University of Washington professor and author of a seminal book about salmon, "King of Fish," observed as much.

"The salmon and the landscape evolved together. Then people arrived and relied on the salmon," he said. "Each is part of the others in a deep and fundamental way."

A Sustainable Superfood

Salmon are so numerous in Alaska that all can enjoy them. Up to 5 billion a year ply the North Pacific. Carefully managed by state fisheries scientists—sustainable fisheries are prescribed in the Alaska Constitution—as many as 1 billion are caught by commercial fishermen, an industry that is worth \$500 million to \$1 billion a year.

The majority of the harvest, by fish numbers and value, is sockeye; chinook is the fish most common on fine dining menus; and silver salmon are fondly regarded by anglers. Every restaurant in the state has salmon on the menu, and vast portions of the commercial fresh harvest are flown south each summer to fill grocery store cooler shelves and restaurant menus in the Lower 48.

Salmon are born in clear-running streams and rivers in summer and fall, overwinter in freshwater, migrate to the ocean the following spring, and return four years later to spawn where they were born. Grown in those rich North Pacific waters, these fish are packed with protein, a superfood that's also divine to eat. Omega-3s lard their fat; immune boosters such as B vitamins are thick; and antioxidants are numerous.

Fish and life in Alaska are perpetually intertwined, generation after generation.

Dee Buchanon, Anchorage, Alaska resident

The deep persimmon color of fresh salmon is one of nature's finest hues. Properly prepared—that is, cooked through but not a half-minute more—salmon is moist, flavorful, enriching, and enticing. Roast it, grill it, fry it, smoke it, steam it—no need for sauces or embellishments. There's no wrong way to cook it, unless you over-cook it.

Once, a friend and I were perusing the menu at a long-gone New Age bistro in Juneau, and could only gawk at the waitress when she described the night's special.

"A half sockeye salmon? Poached in duck fat?"

The waitress nodded. "Yep. For two."

We ordered it. This was the single richest dish I have ever had, anywhere in this world. We shouldn't have eaten it all, but we did.

If I were a condemned man, my last meal would be fire-roasted sockeye

salmon (with cherry pie and fresh corn). The occasion would deserve a blessing—for the fish. Here's one Alaskans have used for centuries to welcome the summer's first salmon, from commercial fisherwomen Emma Teal Laukitis and Claire Neaton, the "Salmon Sisters." They adapted it from a book on Native culture by Hilary Stewart, who in turn adapted it from a traditional Native prayer. Now I will go and lay you down on this mat which is spread on the floor for you, Swimmer. This is your own saying when you came And gave a dream to my grandfathers.

Lasting Bonds

Though the human-salmon bond is ancient, it thrives today. I often joke that every Alaska household has two freezers, one for salmon and one for moose (many Alaskans never tasted beef until they came to the Lower 48 to attend college). Each Alaska resident is entitled to harvest up to 25 salmon per year for personal use, and most do just that.

"Our fish freezer is currently full of salmon, rockfish, halibut, yellow eye, and ling cod," reported Dee Buchanon, an Anchorage business executive who came to Alaska when she was 5 and has been fishing ever since.

"The moose freezer is unplugged because we didn't get one last year—so we traded some fish for moose with our neighbors. It is illegal to 'sell' any wild-caught or harvested wild game, so the barter system is strong in Alaska. We have a new executive assistant at my office who moved up from North Carolina. She asked us, 'Where do I buy salmon?' We all looked at each other with blank stares on our faces. I said, 'You're an Alaskan now. You don't buy salmon. I'll bring you some.'

"Fish and life in Alaska are perpetually intertwined, generation after generation," Buchanon explained.

I reckon the debate over which kind is best dates back as many generations as the harvest. As Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun.

Once, at a fund-raising dinner for salmon conservation, I was seated at a table with six Alaska women, all of whom were commercial fishermen. While perusing the menu (surprise: salmon!), I posed the question of which type is best.

"Boy, Eric, you like to live dangerously," observed one of my companions.

"Even so," I replied. "Your favorite? Above all?"

The six cleared their throats, eyed each other cautiously, and declaimed their choices. Three picked sockeye; three king.

"Guess you'll have to break the tie," Melanie Brown told me.

So I did.

Salmon Smarts

Five kinds of salmon ply the North Pacific in incredible numbers, up to 5 billion a year. Each kind has at least two common names:

Chinook, aka king or spring, are the biggest, ranging from 15 to 100 pounds. They are usually first to return in summer.

Silver, aka coho, are lean, lengthy fish up to 25 pounds. Anglers love them for their flashing, aerial runs when hooked.

Sockeye, aka red, are fatty and flavorful and range up to 12 pounds. Their spawning colors are the most vivid of all salmon.

Pink, aka humpy (for the spawning hump they develop), throng home streams so thickly the water can seem like it's half fish. Usually these are canned, though when fresh, pinks are excellent eating.

Chum, aka dog or keta, are large, muscular fish whose flavor is muskier than that of the other kinds. Rarely seen in stores or on menus, they have been traditionally used as food for Alaska sled dogs, and considered by some the best for smoking.

The keys for salmon shoppers: Freshness is paramount, so ask when the fish came in, and from where; the brighter the color and firmer the fish, the fresher they are; and although fresh-frozen is fine (that is, salmon that was frozen immediately after it was caught, shipped, then often defrosted for sale), it simply isn't as good as fresh, period. And Alaskans fervently favor wild salmon: "Friends don't let friends eat farmed salmon," argues a ubiquitous bumper sticker.



TROUTNUT/SHUTTERSTOCK



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ERIC LUCAS

Each summer and fall the fish return, billions of them, fat and large, from the ocean, and migrate upstream to ancestral spawning grounds.

Eric Lucas has visited Alaska more than 50 times. Author of six Michelin guides, including one that covers the Great Land, he is a retired associate editor at *Alaska Beyond Magazine*. He lives on a small farm on a remote island north of Seattle, where he grows organic hay, beans, apples, and squash.

1. Salmon are born in clear-running streams and rivers in summer and fall, overwinter in freshwater, migrate to the ocean the following spring, and return four years later to spawn where they were born.

2. Melanie Brown, a Bristol Bay fisherman of Yupik/Inupiaq ancestry, with a photograph of her great-grandmother and great-grandfather.

3. Melanie Brown with her kids, Oliver Lamkin and Mariana Bell, and a freshly caught sockeye.

SALMON SOUP

Melanie Brown, a Bristol Bay fisherman of Yupik/Inupiaq ancestry, shared this recipe for salmon soup. It's based on her great-grandmother's fish-head stew.

1 bouillon cube, or 1 teaspoon bouillon paste

1/2 small onion, cut into rings or half-rings

1 celery heart, cut crosswise into 1/4-inch-thick crescents

Sea salt

Onion powder

1/4 cup uncooked rice

2 tablespoons soy sauce or tamari

1 salmon head

Tail end of salmon

Fill a soup pot half full with cold water and place on it medium heat. Add a bouillon cube or bouillon paste and dissolve into heating water.

Sauté onion that has been cut into rings or half-rings. Add celery that has been cut crosswise into crescents across the whole celery heart—roughly seven cuts, about 1/4-inch wide. Add some seasoning of salt and onion powder, so that the flavors bind for the flavor base of the soup. Add onion and celery sauté to the soup when they become softer, but not mushy.

Add the rice to the soup, as well as roughly 2 tablespoons of soy sauce.

Begin preparing your salmon, but don't put into the

soup pot until the rice is cooked.

Rinse excess slime off of the salmon head and make sure that the gills are cut out from under the gill plates. Work carefully, because the head is slippery and difficult to cut through. Cut it in half, so that you have two mirrored sides, and then begin cutting each side into smaller pieces. Cut around the eyes to leave intact for the eye lovers. Also, be sure not to cut through the cheeks—cut around them so that they remain intact. If there's any blood on the pieces after you're done cutting them, be sure to rinse it off with cold water. The blood will discolor the broth and taint the flavor.

Cut the tail portion of the salmon into cubes with the skin still on it. The skin will easily come off when the salmon is cooked in the soup.

When the rice is cooked, turn the heat down to low and carefully place the pieces of head into the soup pot. Use the eye and the cartilage as a visual guide. When the center of the eye is white and the cartilage has turned from clear to milky, put the salmon cubes in and remove the pot from the heat. The fish will cook very quickly.

The cartilage in the head is easy to chew through and very flavorful. Other bits that aren't edible will stay between your teeth when you bite them, and you can sort them out. Make sure that you suck the juice out of the bits before taking them out of your mouth. Your hands will get sticky from the richness of the oil. Just accept the fact that your meal will be a very tactile and visceral experience.

Courtesy of Melanie Brown



Preparing the soup.



Melanie Brown's salmon soup.

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