

FOOD & DINING

GOOD AND GOOD FOR YOU

Baked Fish Matecumbe is an easy, classic dish

Summer flavors of tomato, basil shine in this classic baked fish recipe.

By Virginia Willis
For the A.J.C.

Many people fear cooking fish. The list of worries is long: Will it taste too fishy? How will I know it's done? What if I overcook it?

It's an expensive protein, and no one wants to make a mistake.

Yet fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet, and the Food and Drug Administration recommends adults eat at least 8 ounces of seafood per week.

The key to successfully adding more fish to your culinary repertoire is to keep it simple. First, the best chance of success is to bake fish in the oven, where it is surrounded by heat and not subject to intense direct heat, such as on the stovetop or grill. This lessens the likelihood of fish falling apart when flipping while pan-searing or sticking to the grill. (The rule of thumb is to cook fish 8 to 10 minutes per inch of thickness at 350 degrees.)

Second, know what kind of fish to buy.

Three main categories of fish reflect how they respond to cooking methods: delicate, medium and firm. Examples of delicate fish include sole, flounder and turbot. Pay close

attention when cooking delicate fish, as the fillets are thin and can quickly overcook. At the opposite end are firm fish, including meaty amberjack, tuna and swordfish. They are best prepared with high-heat methods and require hands-on cooking, which is not as simple as putting it in the oven.

Medium fish, including Arctic char, trout, cod, salmon, mahi-mahi, snapper and tilapia, are more solid than delicate fish, but are not as dense as firm fish. They are the easiest to manage. They can be cooked using a variety of methods — broiling, pan-frying and grilling — baking is by far the easiest.

By understanding the cooking method that best suits each category of fish, you'll be better set up for success. For this week's recipe, medium fish like mahi-mahi, cod or snapper spend just 10 minutes baking.

For additional insurance, my favorite hack is to add chopped vegetables to the dish. The vegetables create a protective cover over the fillets and contribute moisture, making it less likely to overcook and be dry.

One bite of this Baked Fish Matecumbe and you'll be hooked.



Fish fillets are baked with cherry tomatoes, capers, lemon and basil for an easy and satisfying seafood supper.
VIRGINIA WILLIS FOR THE A.J.C.

BAKED FISH MATECUMBE

Matecumbe is an island in the northern Florida Keys as well as an eponymous recipe made with fresh chopped tomatoes, capers, basil and citrus. It's bold with bright flavors, and an excellent summer recipe when tomatoes and basil are in season.

Serve with instant couscous as a quick and easy side dish to make this a well-rounded meal.

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
4 (5-ounce) fish fillets such as mahi-mahi, cod or snapper, about ¾-inch thick
½ teaspoon coarse kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
1 small onion, diced
2 tablespoons salted capers
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
2 tablespoons freshly chopped basil, plus whole leaves for serving
black pepper

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Drizzle 1 tablespoon oil in a medium baking dish. Add fish fillets. Season on both sides with salt and pepper. Turn to coat in the oil. Scatter the tomatoes, onion, capers, lemon zest, lemon juice and chopped basil over the fish fillets. Drizzle with the remaining tablespoon olive oil. Bake until the fish is firm, about 10 minutes. Garnish with fresh basil leaves. Serve immediately.

Serves 4

Per serving: 213 calories (percent of calories from fat, 37, 27 grams protein, 16 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams total sugars, 2 grams fiber, 9 grams total fat (1 gram saturated), 61 milligrams cholesterol, 322 milligrams sodium).

Don't diss these flavored rums



Jerry and Krista Slater
Distilled & Fermented

In the scorching summer heat, we find ourselves craving a refreshing, tropical cocktail that isn't overly complicated. While there are lots of flavored spirits out there, quality products are pretty limited.

Thankfully, Alexandre Gabriel of Planteray makes delicious, historically accurate, flavored rums that please the nerdiest of bartenders and cocktail aficionados.

Planteray's Stiggins' Fancy pineapple rum and Cut & Dry coconut rum exceed expectations for a category of spirits that normally might be looked down on.

Rums from Planteray, formerly known as Plantation, are widely available. Regarding the original name, Gabriel, head of the French company Maison Ferrand, said an American friend pointed out "the painful associations of 'plantation' for many." In the new name, "plant" references the sugar cane that rum is produced from and "ray" refers to the sun that helps grow the cane.

Planteray makes high-quality white and aged Barbados and Jamaica rums, focusing on maturation in American and French barrels.

The first product under the new moniker was Cut & Dry. Coconut from Barbados is cut into small chunks and then dried. It takes one coconut per liter of rum to achieve the desired flavor profile.

Pour it into a glass and the aromas are reminiscent of an Almond Joy, with sweet coco-



Planteray makes flavored rums that are delicious on the rocks or in a cocktail such as the coppertone daiquiri. JERRY SLATER FOR THE A.J.C.

COPPERTONE

To make simple syrup, heat ½ cup of granulated sugar and ½ cup of water in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring frequently until the sugar dissolves. Allow it to cool to room temperature before storing in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to one month.

½ ounce Planteray 5 year rum

½ ounce Planteray Stiggins' Fancy pineapple rum

½ ounce Planteray Cut & Dry coconut rum

½ ounce fresh lime juice

½ ounce simple syrup

Combine all ingredients in a cocktail shaker, add ice and shake vigorously.

Strain into a cocktail glass and serve.

Serves 1

Per serving: 191 calories (percent of calories from fat, 0), trace protein, 12 grams carbohydrates, 11 grams total sugars, trace fiber, trace total fat (trace saturated fat), no cholesterol, 9 milligrams sodium.

nut and hints of nuts and cocoa from the aged rum. At 80-proof, it makes a great addition to your tropical cocktail options.

Stiggins' Fancy is the first infused rum Planteray made, in collaboration with cocktail historian David Wondrich. Pineapple rum was a sought-after treat in 19th-century

England, and much lauded in Charles Dickens' "Pickwick Papers." Named after the Rev. Stiggins in the book, the recipe was inspired by one published

in 1824.

In making the rum, ripe pineapples are infused into dark rum for several months and, simultaneously, pineapple skins (used for their fragrant oils) are soaked in rum. After being distilled again, the two products are blended into a bold expression of rum and pineapple.

Stiggins' Fancy is 80-proof and great when served on the rocks. It also is a wonderful substitute in a daiquiri, such as our original Coppertone recipe.

Applejay

continued from E9

and make them accessible for us."

Despite being surrounded by wineries and cideries in North Georgia, House of Applejay is doing something different. Distilling a liqueur is akin to creating a perfume — pulling the essence out of the fruit, not just its flavors, Porsiel said. And the best ingredients for distilling aren't necessarily the best for eating, which visitors to the nearby orchards might be surprised to learn.

While Porsiel noted that a lot of people had hoped the distillery's signature product, Applejay from Ellijay, would be made with only local apples, that's not the case. "I wish I could," she said, "but during Prohibition, a lot of the distilling apples and the cider-making apples disappeared. What we need is actually not something that is edible. We need something that has a beautiful smell. It's tying back to perfume-making."

Besides apple liqueur, House of Applejay produces cherry, cranberry and juniper versions — the three products that garnered success at the 2025 San Francisco competition.

The cherry liqueur has rich notes reminiscent of an old-fashioned, with a touch of bitterness and spices. The juniper liqueur has the notes you'd expect from gin, but without the citrus elements. The cranberry liqueur tastes exactly like its base fruit, but with hints of baking spices.

Visitors can book a \$25 tour of the operation, which includes sampling in the tasting room that Sabine Porsiel manages. Besides sipping liqueurs, visitors can taste the distillery's two vodkas — Mt. Frozen Knob, which is the foundation for all the liqueurs, and another vodka infused with sweetgrass from the region.

While House of Applejay products are sold only in the tasting room, the owners plan to begin distribution in Georgia and Florida in the coming months.

Caroline Porsiel said opening a distillery in the U.S. — and in East Ellijay, specifically — allowed her opportunities that she might not have had in the crowded liqueur field in Germany, where most distilling permits are passed between family members.

"There are not a lot of countries in the world that offer a female distiller a chance to pursue her dream," she said. "I'm really, really very thankful."

House of Applejay:
67 Fowler St., East Ellijay,
404-771-4332, houseofapplejay.com



House of Applejay uses a German-made still to make the vodka used in its liqueurs. COURTESY OF HOUSE OF APPLEJAY



These shelters, known as "bear barrels," provide a cozy, shaded spot to sip House of Applejay liqueurs. COURTESY OF HOUSE OF APPLEJAY



The mother-daughter team of Sabine (left) and Caroline Porsiel own House of Applejay distillery in East Ellijay. CAROLINE EUBANKS FOR THE A.J.C.