Main dishes / Italy

Pesce all'Acqua Pazza

Whole sea bream or bass simmered in 'crazy water' — a broth of olive oil, cherry tomatoes, garlic, and white wine that is barely a sauce, barely a broth, and perfectly Neapolitan.

Time 35 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Whole sea bream or sea bass (gutted, scaled, 500–700 g each)
- ☐ 40 parts Cherry tomatoes (halved)
- ☐ 20 parts Water or light fish stock
- ☐ 5 parts Flat-leaf parsley (roughly chopped)
- ☐ 2 parts Fine sea salt
- ☐ 5 parts Garlic cloves (thinly sliced)
- ☐ 25 parts Dry white wine (e.g. Falanghina, Verdicchio)
- ☐ 20 parts Extra-virgin olive oil (generous)
- ☐ 1 parts Dried red chili flakes (or fresh peperoncino)

Let's make it.

01 Score each fish with 3–4 deep diagonal cuts on each side, cutting through to the bone — this allows seasoning to penetrate and ensures even cooking. Season inside and out with salt, including into the cavity and the score marks. Allow to rest at room temperature for 10 minutes while you prepare the broth base. Pat the exterior dry with paper towels before adding to the pan.

02 In a wide, lidded pan large enough to hold the fish flat, warm the olive oil over medium heat. Add the sliced garlic and chili flakes. Cook gently for 1–2 minutes, stirring, until the garlic is softened and just beginning to turn pale gold at the edges — not brown. Add the halved cherry tomatoes, pressing a few gently with the back of a spoon to release their juice. Cook another 2 minutes until the tomatoes begin to soften and the oil takes on their color.

03 Pour the wine and water into the tomato base and raise heat to bring to a brisk simmer. Lay the seasoned fish flat in the pan — they can overlap slightly if necessary. Spoon some of the broth and tomatoes over the fish. Cover with a lid and cook on medium heat for 12–15 minutes, depending on the size of the fish. The fish is done when the flesh at the deepest score mark pulls away from the bone cleanly and is opaque white all the way through.

04 Scatter the roughly chopped parsley over the fish and pan. Drizzle a final generous stream of your best extra-virgin olive oil directly over the fish and broth. The raw olive oil added at the end is essential to the dish's character — it emulsifies into the broth as you spoon it over. Serve the fish whole in the pan or carefully transferred to a deep platter with all the broth ladled around it. Provide good bread to mop the pan.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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