Main dishes / United States

Blackened Catfish

Catfish fillets blanketed in a Cajun spice rub, cooked in a screaming-hot cast-iron pan until the exterior chars to near-black and the interior stays moist — intensely smoky and spiced.

Time 20 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Catfish fillets (skin-off, 180–220 g each, even thickness)
- ☐ 5 parts Sweet paprika
- ☐ 1.5 parts Cayenne pepper
- ☐ 1.5 parts Dried oregano
- ☐ 1.5 parts Dried thyme
- ☐ 2 parts Garlic powder
- ☐ 2 parts Onion powder
- ☐ 2 parts Fine salt
- ☐ 1 parts Freshly ground black pepper
- ☐ 10 parts Unsalted butter, melted
- ☐ 5 parts Fresh lemon wedges, to serve
- ☐ 2 parts Fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Let's make it.

01 Combine the paprika, cayenne, dried oregano, dried thyme, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and black pepper in a small bowl and mix thoroughly. Taste a tiny pinch — it should be intensely seasoned and moderately to assertively hot. The paprika forms the bulk and provides the color; the dried herbs carry vegetal complexity; the cayenne and black pepper build the heat. This rub should make you hesitate slightly before putting a full portion on the fish — that is the right level.

02 Pat the catfish fillets completely dry with paper towels on both sides — any surface moisture will steam the fish rather than blacken it. Brush each fillet generously on both sides with the melted butter. Immediately press the spice rub firmly into all surfaces of each fillet — top, bottom, and thin edges. The butter acts as the adhesive; the rub should form a complete, even crust with no bare patches of fish visible. Do not marinate — the salt in the rub will begin drawing moisture out. Cook within 5 minutes of coating.

03 This technique requires the hottest pan and the most ventilation you can manage — open windows and turn on every fan available. Heat a dry cast-iron skillet over the highest heat possible for at least 4–5 minutes, until it is visibly glowing and a drop of water vaporizes instantly. Do not add fat to the pan — the butter on the fish is sufficient, and additional oil will cause dangerous flare-ups. Lay the fillets in the hot pan — there will be a dramatic cloud of dark smoke and an aggressive sizzle. Do not move the fish. Cook for 2–3 minutes per side until the exterior is genuinely near-black with only a faint reddish undertone — this is correct, not burnt. The internal flesh should remain opaque-white and moist.

04 Remove the fillets from the pan immediately when the second side is charred and the thickest part of the fish flakes when pressed gently with a finger, or reads 63°C / 145°F. Transfer to warm plates directly — blackened catfish does not need resting. The charred crust acts as a barrier that slows cooling. Squeeze half a lemon over the fillet immediately — the juice hisses against the char and drives its brightness through the exterior. Scatter parsley. Serve with white rice, coleslaw, or hush puppies.

Recipe & provenance ForkRecipe Kitchen / ForkRecipe / FoodML and contributors / CC BY-SA 4.0.
Original recipe and attribution CC BY-SA 4.0
Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
recipes.dvs-services.be / blackened-catfish