Main dishes

Grilled Whole Branzino

A whole European sea bass seasoned simply with olive oil, lemon, and herbs, grilled over fierce heat until the skin blisters and shatters and the sweet flesh inside steams in its own juices — Mediterranean cooking at its most honest and dramatic.

Time 30 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 2 ea Whole branzino (European sea bass), cleaned and scaled, about 500g each
- ☐ 60 ml Extra-virgin olive oil
- ☐ 2 ea Lemon, half for juice, half sliced thin
- ☐ 4 ea Garlic cloves, lightly crushed
- ☐ 4 ea Fresh thyme sprigs
- ☐ 2 ea Fresh rosemary sprig
- ☐ 6 ea Fresh flat-leaf parsley, whole sprigs
- ☐ 8 g Flaky sea salt
- ☐ 3 g Black pepper, freshly cracked

Let's make it.

01 Using a sharp knife, make 3 diagonal cuts through the skin and flesh on each side of each fish — angled at 45 degrees toward the head, about 1 cm deep and 4 cm long, evenly spaced from the shoulder to the tail. These scores serve two purposes: they allow heat to penetrate the thickest parts of the fish more evenly, and they give the seasoning and cavity aromatics a path into the flesh. Pat the fish completely dry inside and out with paper towels — a dry fish grills, a wet fish steams.

02 Season the cavity of each fish generously with salt and a grind of pepper. Stuff each cavity with crushed garlic, thyme sprigs, a rosemary sprig, a few parsley sprigs, and 2–3 thin lemon slices. The herbs and lemon will perfume the fish from the inside as it cooks. Season the exterior — including into the score cuts — with salt, pepper, and a generous drizzle of olive oil. Use your hands to coat the entire outside surface, making sure oil reaches into every score.

03 Preheat a charcoal grill to high heat, or a gas grill to maximum (you need at least 280°C over the grate). Clean and oil the grate well — a clean, hot, oiled grate is the difference between fish that lifts off beautifully and fish that tears. Lay the fish on the grate at a 45-degree angle to the bars. Do not move the fish for 5–7 minutes. You will know it is ready to flip when the fish releases from the grate without sticking. Flip once using two wide spatulas, and cook the second side for 4–5 minutes.

04 Transfer the grilled fish to a warm platter and rest for 3 minutes before serving. This brief rest allows the residual heat to finish the very centre of the fish and allows the juices in the cavity to redistribute. Squeeze fresh lemon generously over the top — the acid brightens the smoky richness of the grilled skin. Present the fish whole at the table, and use a wide spatula and fork to fillet it tableside: lift the top fillet along the spine, then remove the backbone to reveal the bottom fillet.

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