Main dishes

Mediterranean Grilled Whole Fish

A whole sea bass or bream scored through its skin and filled with lemon slices, herbs, and garlic, then grilled over open coals until the skin blisters and crisps away from the flesh and the flesh itself sweats its juices onto the grate below. The Greek fisherman's answer to technique: simplicity, fire, and time.

Time 30 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 2 fish Whole sea bass or sea bream (400–500 g each), scaled and gutted
- ☐ 60 ml Extra-virgin olive oil
- ☐ 2 lemons Lemon, thinly sliced into rounds
- ☐ 4 cloves Garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ☐ 6 sprigs Fresh oregano sprigs
- ☐ 4 sprigs Fresh thyme sprigs
- ☐ 15 g Fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ☐ 10 g Coarse sea salt
- ☐ 4 g Black pepper, freshly cracked
- ☐ 30 ml Fresh lemon juice (for serving)
- ☐ 4 wedges Lemon wedges, for serving

Let's make it.

01 Pat fish dry inside and out. With a sharp knife, score each side of the fish with 3–4 diagonal cuts, slicing down to the bone. The cuts should be about 2 cm apart. Season the cavity generously with salt and pepper. Fill each cavity with alternating slices of lemon, garlic, and herb sprigs — pack it firmly. Rub the outside of both fish liberally with olive oil, pressing it into the score marks. Season the scored skin with coarse salt and pepper. Let rest at room temperature for 15 minutes before grilling.

02 Prepare a two-zone grill — one side very hot (direct coals or high flame), one side cooler (indirect). Clean the grate aggressively with a wire brush and oil it with a folded paper towel dipped in oil on tongs. Place fish on the hot zone at a 45-degree angle to the grates. Do not move them for 4–5 minutes. The skin will initially stick and then release on its own when the crust has formed. When the fish releases freely, rotate 90 degrees to create crosshatch marks. After 2 more minutes, flip once. Grill second side for 4–5 minutes. If the fish is browning too fast, move to the cooler zone.

03 Lift fish to a warm platter. Let rest 2 minutes — the interior temperature will equalize and carry-over cooking will finish the center gently. Squeeze lemon juice over the entire fish, letting it pool in the score marks and run into the cavity. Scatter torn parsley over the top. Serve whole at the table with lemon wedges. To serve: use two large spoons to lift the top fillet along the lateral line, then peel the backbone away to expose the bottom fillet.

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