

Chef's Corner: Cajun Blackened Cobia and Dirty Rice

MAY 2020

This Louisiana Staple can Curl Your Hair or Tickle your Tongue – Hot or Mild, it's sure to Bring the Gulf Coast to Your Table with Every Succulent Bite!



Blackened Mild with Mushroom Rice and Cheesy Mac!



Hot-n-Spicy Blackened Cobia and Dirty Rice!

2019 was a great year for Cobia fishing across coastal Virginia and the Carolinas! Heck, even I was able to get in on the action!

I have also been fortunate enough to have friends willing to share their catch, which means I have had ample opportunity to create new dishes with this incredibly versatile food fish!

Cobia is a saltwater fish common to coastal Virginia and the Carolinas from Late April through September. It has the same heart-friendly oil content found in salmon, and when consumed raw, the meat looks light tan. But, when fully cooked, Cobia meat is white, moist, firm, and easily flakes. The skin can be tough and draped with small scales, but it is excellent when grilled.

With its firm texture, Cobia can be skewered and grilled; prepared as a juicy steak; filleted and crispy-fried; or it can be smoked, sauced, seared, or poached to release its exquisite taste, which is truly a delight for even the most finicky palate.

As sushi and sashimi, the raw, fleshy meat is flavorful with a rich taste that is truly impressive.

In fact, thinly sliced Cobia also makes excellent fish jerky for those willing to give it a try (look for that in a later issue!)

Cobia meat is a good source of Omega 3 Fatty Acids; protein; and it is high in numerous vitamins such as riboflavin and Vitamin B6. It is also rich in Magnesium, Potassium, Selenium, Niacin, and Sodium.

At between 150-170 Calories per 4-ounce serving, Cobia meat packs a powerful nutritional punch!

With all these great things going for it, more Cobia recipes are sure to appear in future issues of the Chef's Corner!

I hope you have an opportunity to try this month's featured recipe from New Orleans's Cajun Quarter!

Blackened Cobia with Dirty Rice

This recipe features two versions of the same dish within a single meal. The objective is to appeal to daring *and* tender palates without changing the basic approach. In this case, the ladies wanted a milder version while the men elected to crank-up the heat and open-up the taste buds! All left the table happy!

Ingredients:

- 8-12 Cobia 2-inch steaks cut from the shoulder loins
- 2 tablespoons bacon grease, lard, or peanut oil
- Fresh ground black pepper
- Old Bay seasoning (less heat)
- Smoked paprika (less heat)
- Mia's famous mushroom rice (or a nice basmati or whole grain rice)
- Fresh Tomato, Lemon & Spinach for garnish
- * Cajun Shake or Blackened Seasoning (more heat)
- * Ground Cayenne pepper (more heat)
- * Cajun Dirty Rice (for maximum heat)
- * *These ingredients are only used for the hotter version!*

Always cook the mild version first, especially when using a cast iron skillet because the pan sometimes retains some of that Cajun heat. I learned this lesson years ago when my Mom cooked me a hot pepper-n-eggs breakfast and proceeded to use the same skillet for my Stepfather's scrambled eggs. Watching him sweat was a riot as he received a good dose of unexpected residual heat from the skillet!

Directions:

Blackened Mild Version

The biggest differences between mild and hot is the seasoning blend and what I like to call the "*blackening agent.*"

The *mild* seasoning blend used for this dish is Old Bay, and the blackening agent is smoked paprika.

Begin by laying out the Cobia steaks on a flat surface such as a plate or cutting board.

Dust each steak with black pepper, Old Bay, and smoked paprika in that order.

Flip the steaks and repeat for the other side and let stand.

Heat a large skillet on High until it is extremely hot – the hotter the better!

Cast Iron works best, but any modern cookware designed to take high heat will work just fine.

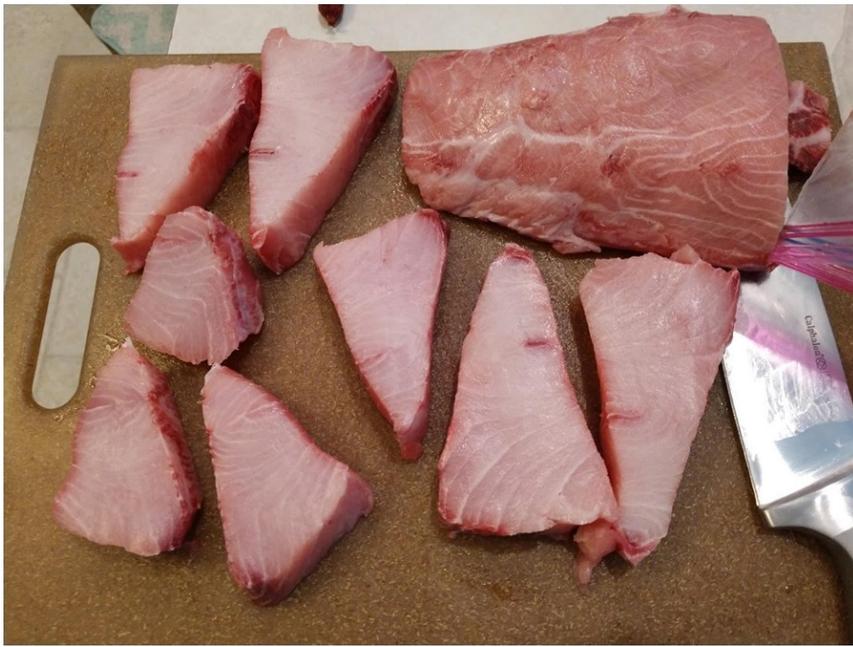
Add one tablespoon of bacon drippings to "season" the skillet.



CHAC Angler Pat Searby with her first Cobia!



Blackened Mild for the Ladies!



Thick-sliced Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel Cobia Loin Steaks!



Spiced-up & Ready to Blacken!

Once the bacon grease is very hot, begin adding the seasoned steaks to the skillet, ensuring they are spaced apart to preclude crowding and assure the moisture is locked in as each steak sears.

If the skillet is hot enough, there will be smoke, so be sure to turn the vent fan to High or cook outdoors!

Sear and blacken steaks for about 2-4 minutes on each side to create a nice bark, and remove immediately when done.

For thicker steaks, I'll sometimes turn the flame off at the end, cover with a lid, and let stand for 1-2 minutes longer.

That method allows the heat to penetrate, and will moisten the surface as the trapped moisture swirls over the steaks.

The desired cook time is up to the chef, but I try to target "medium" as a sweet spot that balances moisture and doneness.



Mia's Famous Mild Mushroom Rice Bake!



Smoking-up the Kitchen on the Mild Side!

Cajun Blackened Hot Version

The blackening process is the same for the hot-n-spicy version with two notable exceptions:

Cajun Shake replaces the Old Bay; and, ground cayenne pepper replaces the smoked paprika.

My two “go-to” blackened seasonings are Tony Chachere’s Creole blend and “Slap Ya Mama” Cajun shake, but there are a number of other excellent choices on the market, so experiment and pick your favorite, or get crazy and mix-up your own blend!

Dust the steaks with black pepper, Cajun shake, and cayenne pepper – the heavier the coat of cayenne, the hotter!

Reheat the skillet and add another tablespoon of bacon drippings. The steaks will absorb the drippings as they blacken and the bark cures.

Once the skillet is extremely hot, add the steaks and blacken each side.

NOTE: There *will* be smoke, and unlike the mild version, if not properly ventilated, there will be a lot of coughing and watery eyes around the kitchen as the cayenne pepper vaporizes, so set that fan on High or cook outside on an open gas flame if you’re concerned about ventilation!

Remove the blackened steaks from the skillet and return the skillet to the heat source. Do not wipe the spice and “dirty bits” out of the skillet!

Add another drizzle of bacon drippings, and add cooked rice to the skillet, stirring constantly until the rice “cleans” the skillet and absorbs all that good spice remaining in the pan!

That is the essence of dirty rice (see below)!

In some recipes, a handful of bulk sausage and chopped onion is added to the skillet to render, crisp, and soak-up the spice before tossing in the rice. I have done it that way, and it is excellent! We simply used Mia’s mushroom rice in this recipe!

Serving Suggestions:

Plate with choice of rice and a side of salad to add some “cool” to the meal. Garnish with spinach, lemon, and tomato.



Extra Hot Blackened Cobia and Dirty Rice!



Kickin’ Hot Blackened Cajun Cobia!



Use same Skillet to Dirty-up the Rice with a Cajun kick!

Additional Ways to Enjoy Cobia

Here are some additional meals that include Cobia as the featured ingredient:

- Pineapple-habanero Barbecued Cobia Ribs
- Carolina-style Cobia BBQ with Slaw
- Cobia Seafood Gumbo with Shrimp, Andouille, & Dirty Rice
- Mediterranean Broiled Cobia Fillets
- Fried Cobia Ribs with Thai Sweet Chili Sauce
- Grilled Cobia Steaks
- Baked Cobia with Hollandaise Sauce
- Crispy-Fried Cobia Bites
- Pan-seared Honey-Lemon-Cobia
- Sautéed Cobia with Vegetables
- Chunky Curried Cobia
- Citrus-honey Cobia Jerky



Pineapple-Habanero BBQ Cobia Ribs!

These are but a few of the recipes I have discovered and tried, and all are exceptional. The list indeed goes on and is open to the imagination!



Broiled Cobia Steaks!



Grilled Cobia!



Sautéed Cobia and Vegetables!



Cobia Seafood Gumbo!



Fried Cobia Ribs with Chili Sauce!



Cobia BBQ with Cole Slaw!



Contributed by: CHAC member John Germanos, aka "The Instinctive Chef," and inspired by Louisiana's Cajun District.