

Chef's Corner: Spanish Mackerel Fillets Broiled 4 Ways

August 2019

We put these four popular seasoning techniques to the test on fresh-caught, buttery Spanish Mackerel fillets, and the winner is...The Lucky Taste Testers!

Welcome to the Cape Hatteras Angler's Club (CHAC) "Chef's Corner" recipe of the month!

This recipe is particularly timely given the GREAT showing of Spanish Mackerel we've had thus far along all our OBX beaches! I hope you all enjoy this simple – yet delicious – recipe!

Fresh Spanish Mackerel fillets may be one of the most underrated delicacies readily available in local waters from May through October.

As with most quality game fishes, the key to preserving the color, texture, and flavor is ice, ice, and *more ice* IMMEDIATELY after the catch!

If you have more fillets than you plan to eat within three days, simply vacuum-seal the extras in portion-sized packages, and you can enjoy quality fillets out of the freezer well into the winter!



Sampler Platter for Our Lucky "Taste Testers!"

When we spend time in North Carolina's Outer Banks (OBX), fresh seafood comes standard. We like to try all sorts of flavors and cultural cuisines, and this month's feature is a taste-test testimonial for sure!

I prepared broiled Spanish Mackerel fillets with four of our favorite spice combinations to determine which would reign supreme in the Germanos household.

Each Lucky taste Tester received a section of each recipe as a "taste-test".

The fillets were plated with fresh cut green beans and homemade mashed potatoes (extra drippings are great on the mashers too!).

One thing's for sure, each flavorful morsel was Daughter-tested and Mother- approved, and that is a true "Win-Win!"

INGREDIENTS

The key ingredient is properly iced and filleted fresh Spanish Mackerel fillets, although this could be just as easily be applied to the Bluefish fillets pictured below right (note the beautiful color and texture – signs of well-iced and filleted fish – *foot stomp*)!

Four (4) 12-ounce fillets on the left were chosen for their uniform thickness

Half stick of butter (olive oil is a quality substitute)

ONE: Cajun and/or Creole seasoning – there are several out there, and all are good

TWO: Old Bay brand seasoning or other crab-boil spice blend of your choice

THREE: Lemon-pepper seasoning

FOUR: Salt, pepper, garlic powder, oregano, and paprika

Fresh lemon halves for squeezing

Lemon wedges for garnish

DIRECTIONS:

Here's the step-by-step instructions for preparing Spanish Fillets Broiled 4 Ways (applies to Taylor Blues as well):

Melt enough butter to drizzle over fillets while broiling.

Lay fillets out on broiling platter, skin side down.

Drizzle melted butter over each fillet – just enough to lightly coat for broiling. Olive oil is an acceptable alternative to butter.

Broil on High and at highest rack setting to get the full broiling effect. I close the broiler door to keep heat in the oven.

When fillets are starting to brown, remove broiling platter, and baste the fillets with the butter and drippings in the platter until all surfaces have been re-oiled or moistened, then season with any of the following spice recipes (or substitute your own):

- Mediterranean Style: In this order – garlic powder, oregano, black pepper, salt, paprika.
- Cajun Style: I can provide my personal Cajun concoction if desired, but Tony Chachere's Cajun or Creole shake is good, as is Slap Ya' Mama shake. If you want to kick-it up a notch, add extra sprinkles of ground cayenne pepper.
- Chesapeake Style: Sprinkle Old Bay over fillets for that traditional taste of the Bay.
- Lemon-Pepper Style: Can use any commercial Lemon Pepper Seasoning, or simply coat with coarse black pepper and garlic salt (squeeze fresh lemon juice liberally over the fillets at the end).

Once the fillets are seasoned, choose either of the following methods to “finish” the dish without burning the spices:

- Leave the oven on “Broil,” place the broiling platter on the lowest rack possible, close the oven, and “Broast” for 5-10 minutes based on fillet thickness. Over-cooking will dry out any fish, so err on the “less” side of time.
- After taking the broiling platter out to season fish, switch oven to “Bake” on “High” at a temperature of 425 degrees. This is where keeping the broiler door closed during broiling pays off as the oven is usually at 425 degrees already when the switch turns to “Bake” – no waiting to heat up!

7. When the fillets are done, and the butter has returned to sizzling slightly in the pan, remove from oven; and finish as follows based on seasoning selected:

- Mediterranean Style: Squeeze lemon juice over fillets and re-baste with the lemon and butter drippings prior to plating.



Spanish Mackerel and Bluefish Fillets Caught in the Surf in Buxton, NC in June 2018



Spanish Mackerel Fillets Broiled Four Ways!

- Cajun Style: A light drizzle of dry sherry to de-glaze the pan and meld with the sizzling butter produces an excellent “sauce” to drizzle over the fillets when plating.
- Chesapeake Style: Drizzle butter drippings over fillets before plating, or for more decadence, drizzle freshly melted butter on top as well!
- Lemon Pepper Style: Drizzle butter over finished fillet and serve!

NOTE: Being a Greek, I like fresh lemon juice squeezed on all of the above, and that is certainly an option for those that like that touch of acidity with a buttery dish (fresh-squeezed lime juice works as well!).



Wife Frances: Lucky Taste-Tester #1!



Daughter Mia (aka #3): Lucky Taste Tester #2!

In a very close contest, the testers stayed loyal to their heritage and gave the Mediterranean Style fillets the nod in the final taste test, but all agreed that the REAL winners were the Lucky taste Testers pictured above!

Needless to say, all plates were cleaned, and no leftovers survived the test - I made sure of that!

Afterthoughts: I hear a lot about removing the “bloodline.” Rubbish. This area is loaded with nutrition, flavor, and essential oils – as is the skin. Provided the fish and fillets are well iced and cared for, this is unnecessary!

However, I do use a very sharp fillet knife to clinically remove the small line of pin bones that run between the shoulder loins from top-to-bottom. Simply trace the line of bones on each side down to the skin and peel the strip out, being careful not to cut all the way through or take any meat out unnecessarily. You may also broil the fish and pull the pin bones out after cooking – especially for larger fillets!

Contributed by: CHAC Angler John T.H. Germanos (aka “The Instinctive Chef”)

