

Recipe

Baked Whole Fish with Savory Thai Pesto

Fish Ingredients

1 whole fish (cleaned and 1 ½ to 2lbs) — Pomfret, Red Snapper, Tilapia, etc

1 bunch of green onions

1 juicy lime—sliced into rounds

1 handful of fresh cilantro on-the-stem

Salt & pepper

Fish Directions

- Preheat the oven to 375F.
- Line the stomach cavity of the fish with the lime slices, greens tops of the onion, and coriander leaves/steams.
- Score the fish skin (on both sides) with a sharp knife. Cut ½ inch-deep diagonal lines into the flesh. The scoring lines should be about 2 inches long.
- Rub the skin of the fish then with a little vegetable oil, salt and pepper.

Thai Pesto Ingredients

2 medium limes—juiced

3-4 peeled cloves of garlic

2 Thai whole chilis (or jalapeño)

1 tablespoon of dark brown sugar

1 tablespoon of Thai fish sauce (nam pla)

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil

1 cup of fresh cilantro leaves/stems

6 fresh mint leaves



¼ cup of warm water

Thai Pesto Directions

- Juice your lime into a blender or food processor.
- Add in the fish sauce, brown sugar, garlic, herb leaves/stems, warm water, chilis, and vegetable oil.
- Blend or pulse on high until a bright-green, smooth dressing forms. ((If it looks a little too chunky, you can dribble in a little warm water—up to ¼ cup—to thin it out)).
- Pour the pesto into a jar or bowl and set it aside.

Whole-Fish Baking Directions

- Oil a large sheet of aluminum foil. Place the scored whole fish on top, pouring 1/3 of the pesto on both sides of the fish.
- Massage the skin of the fish with the sauce using your hand—rubbing some of the pesto inside the fish’s cavity as well.
- Wrap the fish in the aluminum foil, sealing the edges so the steam won’t escape during cooking. To wrap the fish:
 - Bring the long sides of the foil up and over your whole fish.
 - Scrunch the sides up to the top to seal.
 - Create a little tent of air over the fish with the foil—the top of the fish should **not** touch the fish skin. The air space should be 2 inches tall or so.
 - Close up / fold the sides of the foil so the liquid / steam won’t escape
- Place the foil-wrapped fish in an oven-safe baking dish or metal sheet pan. Bake the fish for at least 20 minutes. (Depending on the size and thickness of your fish, it may take a little longer to cook). You’ll know the fish is done when the inside is flakey/white—with no gray or pink patches of flesh.



- Remove the fish from the oven, opening the foil to let some of the steam release. Dress the fish in another 1/3 cup of the pesto.
- Return the fish (with the foil open) to the oven. Turn on the broiler (high). Broil the exposed fish for 4-5 minutes—or, until it's lightly crisped and browned up top.
- Serve the whole fish on a platter with the juices that have accumulated in the foil. Garnish with lime slices and some fresh-chopped cilantro leaves.

Chef Chris Atwood's Notes:

Steamed whole fish is a staple in many East and Southeast Asian cuisines—from China to Thailand. Steaming the fish creates a moist, flakey result—without drying out the delicate fish flesh. But, steaming fish doesn't always create much of a texture-contrast. In Thailand, whole fish is often baked and then char-broiled—giving you the best of both worlds: moist/flakey flesh and a crispy-skinned exterior. This flavor-packed Thai “pesto” will keep for multiple days afterwards and can be used to marinate tofu, shrimp, or chicken—either for stir-frying or grilling.

