



SMOKED TROUT

I'LL ADMIT: Most of my fly-fishing is catch-and-release. But when I find myself fishing in streams where keeping fish is permitted, I'm apt to stick one or three in my creel for a freshly caught, freshly smoked rainbow—or brook or brown—trout is surely a feast fit for the river goddess herself.

Fruitwoods, particularly apple, pair well with trout, although I've also smoked fish over peach, cherry, and even orange wood; just substitute a matching fruit juice for the apple juice listed below. You can also experiment with alder, pecan, or oak, depending on your flavor preferences.

A drip pan, such as the one in my 24-inch Camp Chef Smoke Vault, allows you to keep the fish moist and infuse it with even more flavor during the smoking process (Tip: I like to completely clad my drip pan in foil for easy cleanup).

Smoked trout shines when flaked atop a salad, but my favorite way to serve smoked trout is to simply present the whole fish on a plank or platter, accompanied with crackers, capers, fresh dill, and lemon wedges, along with some creamy chèvre.

Smoked Trout

Serves 12 to 16 as an appetizer

1/2 cup kosher salt	1/2 tablespoon allspice berries, crushed	ones to equal 4 to 5 pounds), cleaned but not filleted (head on or off, as you prefer), and gills removed
1/2 cup organic brown sugar	1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns, crushed	Apple wood chunks, for smoking
2 lemons, cut into thin rounds	2 bay leaves	2 quarts (1/2 gallon) organic apple juice
1/2 tablespoon juniper berries, crushed	1 (18- to 24-inch) trout (or several smaller	
1/2 tablespoon coriander seeds, crushed		

**Recipe, styling,
and photos
by Susan L. Ebert**



Susan L. Ebert admires a Cumberland River brown trout.

In a large stockpot over medium-high heat, stir together the salt and brown sugar with 8 cups water. Add the lemons, juniper berries, coriander, allspice, peppercorns, and bay leaves and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove the stockpot from the heat and let the brine cool to room temperature.

Place the trout in a baking dish with high sides, just large enough to fit the fish, and pour enough brine over the fish to completely cover it. Top with a plate, if necessary, to keep the fish completely submerged. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 24 hours.

When you are ready to smoke the fish, transfer

it from the brine to a wire rack above a drip pan (reserve the brine). As the fish dries it forms a "pellicle," a thin, dry exterior coating that serves to lock in moisture, which is necessary during the smoking process. This drying process may take several hours; you can speed it up somewhat by using a table fan. When the pellicle has formed, the fish will feel dry-to-lightly-tacky to the touch and is ready to smoke.

Some folk still insist on soaking wood chunks in water before adding them to the smoker, but this isn't necessary. In fact, what you see when you first add soaked wood chunks to your smoker is steam, not smoke: The smoke will not develop

until all of the moisture evaporates. For best taste—especially with delicately flavored trout—you want to aim for a thin, blue, almost invisible blue smoke.

Begin smoking the fish at 150° F, with the drip pan an inch or two deep with a 50/50 mixture of the reserved brine and the apple juice. Replenish the liquid as necessary during the smoking process. Smoke slowly—between 170° and 200° F—for 2 to 3 hours, or until the flesh of the fish is opaque and flakes easily with a fork.

Enjoy your smoked trout right away, or to store, vacuum-seal the cooled fish and freeze until ready to use.

*Find this and more than 175 other organic wild game, seafood, foraged foods, and garden fare recipes in *The Field to Table Cookbook* by Susan L. Ebert (Welcome Books, 2016), available in the Cowgirl magazine store at store.cowgirlmagazine.com.*