



ANSON MILLS

Cornmeal Crusted Black Skillet Fish with Shallot Sprinkles

Yield

4 main dish portions

Time

About 2½ hours for the shallots and 10 to 15 minutes to prepare the fish

Cooking Remarks

If your oven has a convection function, by all means, use it to dry the shallots. They seem to welcome air circulation without scorching heat—but then, who doesn't? If you have a food dehumidifier, we consider you a pro already. If you have a regular oven, no worries, the process will simply take longer.

One secret to the success of this technique is the thickness of the fish. We found that fillets between ½ and 1 inch thick perform best in a cornmeal dredge pan fry.

This fish preparation goes compatibly with braised greens or broccolini, all manner of winter squash or sweet potatoes, or on a toasted bun with coleslaw or potato salad on the side.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a baking sheet; parchment paper; a sharp paring knife; a small bowl; a shallow baking dish; a large, well-seasoned cast-iron skillet; and a thin metal spatula.

Ingredients

for the shallot sprinkles

- 4 ounces (3 or 4 large) shallots
- ¼ teaspoon fine sea salt
- c teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon curry powder (optional)
- ½ teaspoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

for the fish

- 1½ pounds skinless white fish fillets (such as black bass, sea bass, hake, flounder, tilapia, or cod), between ½ and 1 inch thick, in 4 evenly sized pieces
- 1 juicy lemon, cut in half
- 5 ounces (1 cup) Anson Mills Coarse Yellow Cornmeal
- Olive oil for frying
- Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

for serving

2 to 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and warm

Lemon wedges

Directions

- 1. Make the shallot sprinkles:** Adjust the oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 200 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 2.** With a sharp paring knife, peel the shallots, cut each in half lengthwise, and then cut crosswise into very thin, even slices. Turn the slices into a small bowl. Sprinkle with the salt, cayenne, and curry powder (if using), and drizzle with the olive oil. Using a fork, toss the shallots until evenly coated and the layers have separated. Turn the shallots onto the prepared baking sheet and distribute into a thin, even layer with the fork. Bake until the shallots are brittle, dry, and golden, about 20 hours, stirring and redistributing into a thin layer two or three times. Let cool to room temperature.
- 3.** Transfer the shallots to a food processor and process to coarse crumbs, about 15 seconds. Turn the shallots into a small bowl—you should have about ¼ cup—add the parsley, and toss together. Set the shallot sprinkles aside.
- 4. Cook the fish:** Dry the fish fillets on paper towels. Place them in a single layer on a large plate and squeeze the juice from a lemon half onto the fillets. Turn the fillets and squeeze over the second lemon half. Allow the fish to cure in the lemon juice until the flesh begins turn slightly opaque, about 5 minutes.
- 5.** Meanwhile, turn the cornmeal into a shallow baking dish and distribute it into an even layer. Line a plate with paper towels and set it near the stove. Pour olive oil into a large, well-seasoned cast-iron skillet to a depth of about ¼ inch and set the skillet over high heat if your fillets are closer to ½ inch thick or just slightly lower than high heat if they're on the thicker side.
- 6.** Generously sprinkle the surface of the fillets with salt and pepper, and then place them one by one seasoned-side down in the cornmeal. Generously sprinkle the second sides with salt and pepper. Firmly press down on the fillets so that the cornmeal adheres to the fish. Turn the fillets and coat the second sides in the same way.
- 7.** When the oil shimmers and is just barely beginning to smoke (on an instant-read thermometer, it should register about 385 degrees if you are cooking thicker fillets or about 400 degrees if you have thinner ones), lower the coated fillets one by one into the skillet; they should immediately sizzle. Fry without disturbing for 2 minutes for thinner fillets or 3 minutes for thicker fillets, shaking the pan a little to make sure the fish isn't sticking (it won't have if the oil was hot enough). Use a thin metal spatula to gently lift gently a fillet to check the color of the crust; if it appears to be darkening too quickly, lower the heat just slightly. When the fillets are deep golden brown, turn them carefully one by one with the spatula and continue to cook until the second sides are deep golden. The total frying time should be not greater than 6 minutes.

8. Using the spatula, transfer the fillets one by one from the skillet to the paper towel-lined plate to drain briefly. Place the fillets on a warmed platter or warmed individual plates, spoon the melted butter over the fish, and sprinkle with the shallot sprinkles. Serve with lemon wedges.