



Culinary Craftwork

Newsletter: August 2010

Summer Seafood

Enjoy the ocean's bounty!

Hot Off The Press!

My new website is up and running. Come visit and let me know what you think.

www.CulinaryCraftwork.com

This issue of the newsletter focuses on summer seafood with 4 wonderful easy recipes: **The Ultimate Shrimp Cocktail (Page 5); Baja Fish or Shrimp Tacos (Page 6); Ginger-Honey Planked Salmon (Page 8); and Halibut with Lemongrass, Thai Curry & Coconut Milk (Page 9).**

Culinary Craftwork is my business, which specializes in offering private, semi-private, and group cooking classes. Some of you may remember me from when I taught cooking classes at Williams-Sonoma in Los Gatos. I am grateful to all of you who encouraged me to branch out on my own!

The Culinary Craftwork experience is different in that the classes I offer are fully customizable to what you want. I teach the classes in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. And I do all the shopping.

It is my mission to give you the tools you need to prepare meals that will seduce you with savor and wow your guests.

My website contains many sample menus that focus on building different skills, but I am happy to partner with you and come up with something new. The classes are fun, informal, and informative — and you get to eat!

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. My newsletter also includes a section called "Ask the Chef," so please don't be shy—email me with your questions.



Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

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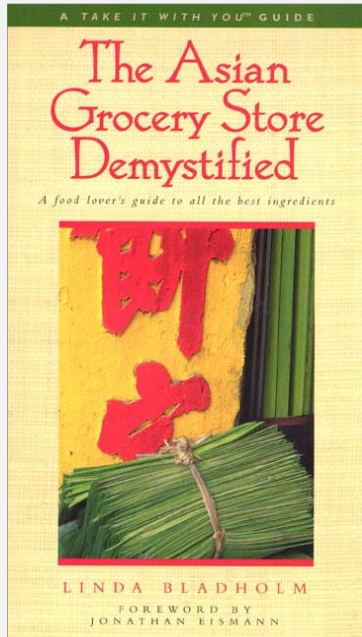
Visit me on the web:

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A Useful Resource



Many of us eagerly explore Asian cuisine in restaurants but find that we're sometimes out of our element in an Asian grocery store.

I can understand that feeling. It took a significant effort on my part to become comfortable in the aisles.

The Asian Grocery Store Demystified (Take It with You Guide) by Linda Bladholm is a great resource for both beginners and veterans. The book can be viewed online at no cost in its entirety at Google Books (See link below). It is also available at Amazon quite inexpensively.

The Asian Grocery Store Demystified

[Click here to view the *The Asian Grocery Store Demystified* online at no cost from Google Books.](#)

[Click here to view book reviews on Amazon.com](#)



People often ask me about my favorite food, and I'm usually left stumbling over my words because I have so many favorites. Yet, invariably, I whittle the list down to fish and seafood. Many people don't cook seafood well, despite the fact that it is usually very easy to cook (and even easier to overcook, resulting in dry, "fishy" tasting fish). In my cooking classes I have often found that people tend to be intimidated by the prospect of cooking fish, so I just love knocking down the fear barrier and showing my students how it should be done.

But the problem is not just in the cooking, it is also in the purchasing and handling. Though we live on the West Coast, there is a relative dearth of quality seafood available to us locally, and much of what is available is quite pricey. I admit I am very picky about freshness and quality, and many supermarkets are lax in their handling of fish. I don't buy seafood at Safeway or Lucky's—I just don't trust them. That may seem harsh, but that's the way it is.

The South Bay Area is culturally rich and diverse, and we are fortunate to have a number of groceries that cater to various ethnicities. I love exploring Indian and Asian markets; it is always a little bit of an adventure discovering new things and learning what to do with them. So many exotic spices and dried goods! The produce departments tend to carry many varieties not seen in the average supermarket, and the prices are often lower. Recently we bought a basket of strawberries for \$.69 at the Lion supermarket—that's less than the cost of a candy bar!

The shelves of Asian markets are filled with bags and jars containing mysterious condiments, and the fish counter is an elaborate display of whole fish on ice, live fish, crabs and lobsters in tanks, and other seafood behind glass cases. It can be a frenzied and somewhat intimidating environment, which takes a bit of getting used to. I found Linda Bladholm's book, *The Asian Grocery Store Demystified*, to be a handy resource (see sidebar). Seafood is a major part of the Asian diet and it is generally priced competitively; so, it is possible to get some very good deals. If you purchase a whole fish, they will even clean it for you.



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Asian supermarkets offer an abundance of fish and seafood, but you have to know what you're looking for and not feel intimidated about the possible language barrier. The clerks don't spend a lot of time on niceties, so when your number is called (if they are even using numbers), be ready to tell them what you want. Don't be afraid to ask your fish monger what they recommend for a particular recipe. Whole Foods and Cosentino's are particularly helpful, but if you're used to that kind of service, you'll be in for a shock at the Lion or Ranch Market.

In whole fish, seek out those with bright red gills and clear eyes with a clean, briny smell and no "fishyness." But what if you're purchasing fillets? How can you tell whether the flesh will be firm and sweet, or soft and tainted with iodine or ammonia? This is a bit of a dilemma.



First, look to see how the fish are displayed; are the fillets neatly packed? (like in the picture above). Check to see whether the fillets are smooth-surfaced; if there are ruptured seams and gaps in the flesh you can probably assume that the fish has been mishandled or frozen and thawed. I used to advocate against buying fish that had previously been frozen, but nowadays fish are often flash-frozen on board the ship and distributed worldwide.

Such frozen fish when properly handled may in fact be superior to fish that have been held on board in ice for weeks at a time.

The more upscale markets will have signs indicating whether the fish is fresh or previously frozen and thawed. Frozen, thawed fish may have a wet, mealy consistency, so make sure that you ask to see it up close. Try to smell it too (if possible). Again, you are looking for a clean, briny smell, devoid of "fishyness." Fresh salmon skin actually is redolent of cucumber—odd, but true!

My husband used to think that he hated fish, which is largely because he was never exposed to quality seafood growing up. He was proud to say that he never ate anything that swam or walked sideways, but I've cured him of that. Last night we had a lovely dinner on our patio of Snapper Livornese with a light tomato sauce (using freshly picked tomatoes from our garden), white wine, garlic and black olives. The snapper in question was actually rockfish, also known as rock cod or Pacific red snapper.

One thing to bear in mind when purchasing fish fillets is weight. Fish shrink considerably as they cook, and you should purchase portions that weigh between 6 ounces and 8 ounces. I recently cooked some black cod (also known as sable fish or butter fish) and it shrunk so much that there was barely enough for a portion, leaving me apologizing to my aforementioned dear husband. Sorry, John!

Try to find out from your fish monger or supermarket which fish are in season and which fish are deemed "sustainable," meaning that you will not be dining on a potentially endangered species. See the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Guide on sidebar for more information on sustainability. Right now there are many types of fish in season: Alaskan king salmon, halibut, Pacific Dover sole, mahi-mahi, tuna, swordfish, black cod, rockfish, striped bass—just to name a few.

Monterey Bay Aquarium's West Coast Seafood Guide



"There are only so many fish in the sea... The choices we make today will determine the fate of tomorrow's ocean wild life."

Monterey Bay Aquarium

Many species are being overfished. This ready-to-print West Coast seafood pocket guide from the Monterey Bay Aquarium will help you make choices that are not only good for you, but for our oceans as well.

[Click here to view and print the West Coast Sustainable Seafood Guide - Updated July 2010 \(pdf\)](#)

[Click here to learn more about Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program.](#)

[Click here to learn more about overfishing from ScientificAmerican.com](#)

Clarifying Some Confusion about Shrimp



Q. How are prawns and shrimp different?

A. They're the same thing. The names are regional.

Q. What are Scampi?

A. There is a species of crustacean that lives off of the Italian coast sometimes called scampi. (AKA *Nephrops Norvegicus*)



Nephrops Norvegicus
(AKA Scampi)

However, in Italian the word "scampi" means shrimp, as does "gamberi" and "gamberetti."

"Shrimp scampi," refers to any type of shrimp cooked with garlic, lemon and butter or olive oil.

When it comes to buying shrimp, supermarkets don't usually indicate "frozen" or "fresh," though you may get a big clue by looking at the shrimp (i.e., they may still be defrosting). But here's the big news: don't worry about it! Approximately 1% of shrimp sold in the U.S. has not been frozen—that means that just about every shrimp you've ever bought or eaten has been frozen (and shrimp freeze extremely well). So, this is not something you need to even think about.



In nature, shrimp appear in many different colors, and you're likely to see several of those colors at the market. Shrimp, when raw, may have a greyish cast, or a greyish pink cast, or have whitish tones, or brownish tones, or pinkish tones, with many other shades also on the list of possibilities. For example, Tiger shrimp are striped. There is no correlation, however, between color and tastiness; it is a matter of personal preference and size.

Shrimp sizes can be confusing, even to a pro; they may be labeled small, medium, large, extra large, jumbo, or colossal, and texture tends to vary according to size. They may also be labeled 21/25, 16/20, 26/30 meaning that there is a range in count per pound. Buy the size that is most appropriate for the recipe that you are using.

Tip

Years ago, I learned the Chinese technique of "salt-leaching" — from a Ken Hom cookbook— which means salting shrimp to draw out the moisture, making them more "poppy" and "crunchy" when you cook them. Here's what you do:

Shell and devein a pound of shrimp; then toss them well in a colander with a teaspoon of salt. Let them sit for 1/2 hour. When ready to cook, wash off the salt with running cold water. Then add another teaspoon of salt, and let the shrimp sit for 30 seconds. Wash again.

Repeat this procedure twice more, finishing by washing the shrimp off. They are now ready to cook—and they work extremely well in all kinds of dishes. This technique is not necessary, but it is easy, and I definitely recommend that you try it.

The Ultimate Shrimp Cocktail

5



Shrimp Cocktail is a seafood classic that many make well but few make great. This recipe from [David Rosengarten](#), a renowned foodie, is the best I've ever come across. It results in the juiciest imaginable cocktail shrimp.

When you cook shrimp quickly in a salt-and-sugar water bath, then let them sit for a few hours in the cooled-down liquid, you end up with wonderfully tasty shrimp. Start this great recipe about 3-4 hours before dinner time, and you won't be disappointed.

The Ultimate Shrimp Cocktail

by David Rosengarten
Serves 8 as a first course

Ingredients

- 8 cups water
- 4 teaspoons sugar
- 4 teaspoons coarse salt
- 2 lbs. large shrimp (about 48), unpeeled

Directions

1. Place the water in a large saucepan over high heat. Swirl in the sugar and salt. Bring to a boil.
2. Add the shrimp all at once. Remove saucepan from heat. Let stand until shrimp are cooked. The time will vary depending on many factors, but usually it takes no more than 2 minutes. Keep testing until shrimp is cooked as you like it.
3. Drain shrimp, reserving both the shrimp and the broth. Run shrimp under fresh cold water and place in bowl in refrigerator. Place the broth in another bowl in the freezer to cool quickly.
4. When the broth is no hotter than warm, pour it over the shrimp in their bowl in the refrigerator. Make sure the shrimp are covered with the broth. Hold in refrigerator for 2-3 hours.
5. Remove shrimp from broth, peel and serve with your favorite sauce.

NOTE: My all-time favorite shrimp cocktail sauce is the spicy, red, ketchup-horseradish one. To make it, just mix together 3/4 cup of ketchup, 3 tablespoons of grated horseradish in vinegar, 1 tablespoon of freshly squeezed lemon juice, and a few drops of Tabasco.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Shrimp Preparation Tips



- (1) For maximum flavor, cook the shrimp in their shells.
- (2) Remove the shrimp from the broth.
- (3) Cool the broth quickly and chill the shrimp in the cooled broth.
- (4) Peel and devein after the shrimp have chilled for a couple of hours.

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Wahoo's Fish Taco Santana Row



Located near Maggiano's Little Italy

Wahoo's Fish Taco

3055 Olin Ave, #1030
San Jose, CA 95128
(408) 244-3991

[Click here for more South Bay Wahoo's Fish Taco Locations](#)

Wahoo's restaurant is the next best option to making fish or shrimp tacos at home. They actually use wahoo fish (also known as ono), native to the Pacific; the fish is fresh and firm, gently spiced, and grilled.

The tacos come with the usual accompaniments: pico de gallo, shredded cabbage and a sour cream dressing. Although the restaurant is set up as a fast-food enterprise, the food is of good quality, and it is very inexpensive.

Beverages from the soda dispenser, including iced tea, have unlimited refills and the staff is very friendly and helpful. When it comes to dining on Santana Row, where else are you going to get such good value?

[Click here to see what others have to say about Wahoo's.](#)



Baja Fish or Shrimp Tacos



My husband and I enjoy vacationing in Cabo San Lucas, Baja Sur, Mexico and while there we binge on the local seafood. We especially enjoy eating tacos with fish or shrimp. This past year we were unable to get to Cabo, so we sought out fish tacos at several local restaurants. Of the various restaurants that we tried, only two made decent fish tacos: Rubio's (several locations) and Wahoo's in Santana Row; but I thought we could do a better job at home.

The following recipe is my take on the Baja fish taco. The recipe has several easy-to-make components, and the whole thing can be done within half an hour. This recipe is definitely a winner. The tacos are flavorful but light and healthy (especially if you omit the sour cream dressing); the garlic and chipotle seasoned fish and shrimp are pleasantly spicy without being hot. My husband loves newsletter time because he gets to eat very well!

Baja Fish or Shrimp Tacos

Makes approximately 4 tacos

Ingredients

- ¼ lb. fish (such as rockfish, ono, ling cod, mahi mahi) or shrimp
- 1 can of chipotle chilies in adobo

For the marinade

- 1 chipotle chili
- ¼ cup adobo liquid
- 2 cloves of garlic, crushed
- ¼ cup vegetable oil

For the dressing

- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 ½ tsp. adobo liquid

(Continued on page 7)

[Baja Fish Tacos: Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

[Baja Shrimp Tacos: Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Baja Fish or Shrimp Tacos (Cont.)

For the mashed avocado

- 2 medium or 3 small avocados, diced
- 2 Tbs. diced onion
- 2 Tbs. chopped cilantro
- ¼ tsp. ground cumin
- 2 Mexican (key) limes, juiced
- Salt to taste

For the pico de gallo

- 1 cup seeded, diced ripe plum tomatoes
- ½ cup diced red onion
- 2 Tbs. chopped cilantro
- 1 jalapeno, seeded and minced
- 2 Mexican (key) limes, juiced
- Salt to taste

For the tacos

- 1 cup green cabbage, finely shredded
- 1 cup purple cabbage, finely shredded
- 1 carrot, finely julienned

Directions

1. Cut the fish into several pieces that will fit easily in a grill pan (or if using shrimp, toss the shrimp with the following marinade). In a blender, combine the ingredients for the marinade. Puree well and spread on the fish to coat. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine the sour cream, mayonnaise and chipotle liquid (adobo). Cover and set aside.
3. Make the pico de gallo: Combine the finely diced tomatoes, onions and jalapeno with the chopped cilantro and lime juice. Set aside.
4. Shred the green and purple cabbage and mix with the julienned carrot. Set aside.
5. Mash the avocado with the diced onion, chopped cilantro and lime juice. Season to taste with ground cumin, salt and pepper.
6. Heat a **non-stick grill pan** over medium-high heat. Season the fish/shrimp with kosher salt. Cook the fish. It will cook very quickly; turn over to cook on the other side until just done.
7. Heat the corn tortillas in a pan; turn over and heat through on the other side. Place inside a clean kitchen towel to stay warm. Continue to cook the rest of the tortillas one by one in the pan or steam them in the microwave till hot.
8. Assemble the tacos: Take two corn tortillas and lay them on a plate, doubled up. Cut the cooked fish into strips. Place several strips of fish in the tortillas and top with pico de gallo. Place a small amount of shredded cabbage and carrot in the tortilla. Top with sour cream dressing and fold over the tortillas to form a single taco. Serve with mashed avocado on the side (or in the taco). Serve immediately.

[Baja Fish Tacos: Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

[Baja Shrimp Tacos: Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Taco Serving Tips



Have all your taco fixings' ready to serve buffet style.



Heat the corn tortillas in a pan or wrap a bunch of them together in a clean kitchen towel and steam them in the microwave. The towel will help keep them warm and pliable.

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Planked Salmon Preparation Tips:



Soak the plank overnight in water with a weight on top.



Marinate the salmon, skin side up.



Check the temperature of your grill. The thermometer should read 350F° or 400F°.



When the plank starts to pop and crackle, place the salmon fillets on it, skin side down. Close the lid, and cook the salmon for 10 minutes.

Ginger-Honey Planked Salmon



The [July issue of my newsletter](#) featured a plank-roasted rack of lamb. The results were so good that I decided to revisit the technique with salmon. The cedar plank lent a subtle, woody flavor to the salmon, which was marinated in ginger, soy sauce, orange juice and honey. The salmon cooked in just 10 minutes and was deliciously moist and flaky. Another winner! We had leftovers, which I served chilled with wasabi mayonnaise. The cold planked salmon was absolutely delicious.

To learn how to make your own plank, [click here](#).

Ginger-Honey Planked Salmon

Makes 4–6 servings

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons finely chopped ginger
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ½ cup orange juice
- 1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
- 1 (2-lb) wild salmon fillet, skin on, cut into portions
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 Cedar plank, soaked in water overnight

Directions

1. In a small saucepan, bring ginger, honey, soy sauce, orange juice, and sesame oil to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce temperature to medium and cook until reduced by one-third.
2. Add the marinade to a shallow bowl large enough to hold fish in a single layer; cool 10 minutes or so. Place fish in dish then coat with marinade. Turn fish so that it is skin side up. Cover dish with plastic and set aside for 15–20 minutes.
3. Heat the grill over high heat. Place the cedar plank on the grill. Turn down heat to medium-low. Listen for the crackling and popping of the plank; when that happens, put the salmon, skin side down, on the plank. Close the grill and cook salmon for 10 minutes, to desired doneness.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)



Halibut is a dense, meaty white fish, which stands up to assertive spices. By now, you (my readers) must be well aware that I favor foods with lots of exotic spices. I like my food hot and spicy, but not so hot that you can't appreciate the flavor of the food. Thai curry pastes are made from garlic, ginger, shallots, lemongrass and lots of chilies—among other ingredients and tend to be very hot. This recipe calls for 1–2 tsp. of Thai red curry paste. The coconut milk sauce is sweet, and the curry paste can be a subtle undertone or a more pronounced presence depending on your personal taste. The addition of heavy cream makes this dish luxuriously rich.

Halibut with Lemongrass, Thai Curry & Coconut Milk

Makes 4 Servings

Ingredients

- 1 Tbs. chopped ginger
- 1/4 cup lemongrass
- 1/3 cup mirin
- 1-13 oz can unsweetened coconut milk
- 1 1/2 lbs halibut fillet (4 fillets)
- 1 cup cream
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 1 to 2 tsp. red curry paste

Directions

1. In a pan combine the mirin, lemongrass and ginger and cook on medium heat until reduced by half, about 5 minutes.
2. In a separate **non-stick** pan, sear the halibut on both sides on medium-high heat. Set aside.
3. Whisk the white wine into the mirin and cook another 5 minutes. Add the cream, coconut milk and the red curry paste. Place the halibut in the sauce and let simmer on medium heat until done.
4. Check fish for doneness. The fish should reach a core temperature of 140°. Serve over a bed of jasmine rice. Sautéed spinach is a nice accompaniment.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Poaching the Halibut



Poach the seared halibut in the sauce. The sauce should come one half to three-quarters of the way up the side of the fish.

Be careful not to overcook the halibut, as it is not an oily fish and the flesh tends to dry out quickly. Poaching it in the sauce helps keep it moist. If you can, try to buy thick cut fillets from the center section; avoid the thinner pieces from the tail section.

If the halibut does not look good, you can substitute another fish, such as rockfish or even shrimp. The sauce is delicious, and you'll want to scoop it up with some steamed jasmine rice.

Storing Thai Red Curry Paste



Thai red curry paste can be refrigerated indefinitely, or frozen. An ice cube tray is handy for freezing sauces and pastes in small portions.

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Ask the Chef



I love hearing from people who have read the newsletter or taken one of my classes. I enjoy the opportunity to answer your questions in this general forum, and I hope that my advice is helpful.

Please continue to send me your questions, comments and ideas. They really make my day.

Thank you!

Alyssa

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Ask the Chef (Q&A)

Using Coconut Milk

John asks, "When a recipe calls for coconut milk, are they talking about the liquid inside the coconut?"

Reply: Coconut milk is extracted from the grated flesh of the coconut, usually with boiling water. It is available fresh, frozen or canned. The liquid inside the coconut is coconut water, which is delicious, chilled, as a refreshing beverage. The two cannot be used interchangeably. Canned coconut milk is readily available in most groceries. Coconut cream is the fatty solids of the coconut milk that rise to the top as the coconut milk sits. Some recipes call for cream of coconut, which is a sweetened coconut product usually used in desserts and piña colodas.

Make Your Own Chopped Garlic in Oil

Arpita asks, "I use a lot of garlic in my cooking. Is it okay to use chopped garlic in oil?"

Reply: Yes, if you make it yourself, but it only keeps for a short while refrigerated; however, it can be frozen. Simply chop the garlic in a food processor and blend in some vegetable oil to cover. I do not recommend using the jars of garlic in oil that you find at the supermarket, which have been treated with preservatives. In my experience, that product has a strong flavor with a lot of after-taste.

Building a Better Wild Rice Pilaf

Debra asks, "I like to make a white and wild rice pilaf, but the white rice always ends up mushy. What can I do?"

White rice generally takes 16–20 minutes to cook, and wild rice takes 45 minutes. The only way that you can overcome the difference in cooking time is to cook the two types of rice separately and then combine them after they are cooked. Wild rice uses a liquid ratio of 3 to 1. Generally, not all of the liquid is absorbed, so you may have to drain the rice before mixing it with the white rice. Melt some butter in a large skillet and sauté the white and wild rice together.

Getting Crispy Skin on Roast Chicken

Carol asks, "I want the skin on my roast chicken to come out crispy. Should I baste the chicken or not?"

Reply: Ah, to baste or not to baste—that is the question. But first, many recipes call for rubbing the skin of the chicken with softened butter or oil. You can do that or leave it bare. But to get a really crispy chicken, dry the raw chicken thoroughly with paper towels, inside and out. Season it well with salt and pepper. Roast the chicken at 400F°. Do not baste. I guarantee that your chicken will come out beautifully crispy.