



Grilled Whole Fish

SERVES 4

Chef Francis Mallmann once said, "Fire is such a fragile and beautiful thing." And at his Mendoza restaurant, Siete Fuego, I saw how his words fueled his seven fire-cooking methods. His open-air kitchen was filled with busy cooks, stoking fires in a domed oven and under iron grates called parilla. Outside, his custom metal dome held whole chickens, pineapples, and vegetables from strings as they hung and cooked slowly over a pit of flaming wood planks. Against the brick wall was an infiernillo, a double-decker blaze, searing a row of whole fish. The cook moved each fish from side to side as he explained to me the necessity of oiling the grates to ensure that the fish didn't stick. And once their skin crisped, he moved them to the cooler side of the grate to finish cooking their interiors.

Whole fish is easier to grill than fillets. The skin and bones hold moisture, preventing the fish from drying. And the turning process is even simpler if you use a grill basket. I like to slide lemon slices and chiles into the body and skin of the fish, but orange slices are delicious too. And a generous drizzle of extra virgin olive oil is the perfect "sauce."

INGREDIENTS

2 whole fish (red snapper, trout, or bronzini; about 2 pounds each), gutted

2 teaspoons kosher salt

2 lemons, sliced

2 teaspoons plus 2 tablespoons olive oil

6 green onions, sliced

2 red or green hot chiles

PROCESS:

Pat each fish dry with a paper towel and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

Prepare a charcoal grill with the coals pushed to one side. Alternatively, light one side of a gas grill to medium high heat. Clean the grate and oil with a cloth dipped in 1 tablespoon olive oil.

Sprinkle 1 teaspoon salt into the cavity of each fish. Place half the lemon slices in the cavities (reserve the remaining lemon slices). Rub the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over both fish, top and bottom.

When the coals have turned grey and the temperature is about 400 degrees, place the fish on the grate directly over the coals and cook for 2 minutes. With the oiled cloth, wipe the grate where you are going to flip the fish. With two spatulas, carefully flip both fish and cook another 2 minutes. Move the fish to cooler side of the grill, opposite the coals. Top each fish with chiles, scallions, and remaining lemon slices. Close the lid and cook for 4 to 5 more minutes. Check for doneness: The meat inside the cavity should be flaky and not translucent. You can also check the internal temperature with a thermometer; when it reached 140 degrees, it is done. Remove from grill and serve warm, drizzled with more olive oil.