

Citrus Baked Bream

As I've mentioned before, my wife Jackie isn't all that keen on fishing, or eating fish for that matter, but she does like catching bream in the cooler months when our tropical Cairns sun isn't so fierce. Her favourite recipe spices 'em up a little. Whilst many seafood chefs would be appalled at the thought of garlic-flavoured fish, northern pikey bream are rather strong flavoured little critters in comparison to their cool water cousins.



The finished result.

They really do benefit from some fairly robust seasoning, especially when baked. We tend to bake our bream because of their very low fillet recovery percentage, a 25 cm pikey filleted wouldn't feed a cat; the same fish whole is a reasonable meal for an adult.

Ingredients:

1 decent (25-30cm) bream per person. Pikies have a deeper body profile and smaller tails than the southern species, a legal 23cm fish is usually well over the old-fashioned pound mark. For southern bream and small snapper 30cm would be a better size for hungry diners

2 cloves garlic and a tablespoon of butter (margarine if you must) per fish

Half a lemon (50/50 lemon and lime if you can get limes) and half an orange per fish.

Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Clean and scale the fish. Make 3 or four deep cuts down to the bone on each side with a sharp knife.

Cut the lemon and orange into thin (3mm) slices. Leave the orange slices "in the round" with the skin on. Cut away the skin and pith from the lemon slices as this would add a bitter flavour to the fish. Cut the lemon slices into small wedges.

Squish the garlic cloves in a garlic press if you have one, otherwise crush with the flat of a knife, peel and chop finely. Put the processed garlic in a small bowl.

Add the butter to the garlic and mix well. We want to get to the "garlic studded butter" stage. Put a tablespoon of the mix into the body cavity of each fish, rubbing it into the "yucky bits" along the backbone and where the gills were. The idea is to mask the strong flavour of these "bloodline" areas.

Preheat the oven to 180c and line a flat baking tray with foil.

Pack the cuts on each side of the fish with the lemon wedges. Lay the fish on the foil and arrange the orange slices on each one as per the pic; the orange brightens up the fish and adds a touch of sweetness to the lemon & garlic.

Bake for about 30 minutes at 180c; the fish is cooked when the meat lifts easily from the bone at the shoulder. Serve with a little steamed or fried rice and a side salad. Because the garlic is all inside the body cavity it adds only a subtle flavour enhancement to the fish flesh. The citrus flavours combine with the hint of garlic to transform the "dirty old bream" into a surprisingly tasty seafood dish.

I don't usually think much of baked fish, but I love this variation on the theme.

Recommended wines

The citrus flavours of this dish blend perfectly with the subtle hint of citrus and tropical fruit in a premium Sauvignon Blanc, it's hard to go wrong with anything from Western Australia's Margaret River growing area. Semillon or Semillon chardonnay works well too. **Tropical alternatives:** Murdering Point Panama Gold, Misty Gem.



stuffing the cuts with lemon bits.



All ready for the oven.