

Richmond's Salmon

The best salmon is moist and buttery in texture when served. This technique for preparing salmon in a skillet consistently produces that result. My recipe is mostly a matter of moderate heat and precise timing. So, this is a narrative rather than a list of ingredients. Before you start, you need a skillet with a lid, salt, oil, butter, and two ounces of dry sherry ready to hand.

The fish should be defrosted and at fridge temperature (40 degrees). I like to slice it into 1 inch wide x 3" long strips such that two make a serving. Salt the pink side.

Place a couple of tbsp olive oil and a tbsp of butter in the skillet and start heating (med-high) to about 350 degrees or when the oil shimmers just before the butter browns. Place the salmon pieces, pink side down, in the skillet. Brown for exactly 1 minute 36 seconds and then turn skin-side down and brown for another 1:36. Mind the heat; the liquid in the pan should never smoke, only sizzle and steam.

Holding the lid for the skillet at the ready, splash a liberal amount of dry sherry over the fish and clamp the lid down smartly to trap the steam. Reduce the heat to medium -- just enough heat to keep the liquid in the pan boiling and producing a plume of vapor. This rapidly reduces the cooking temperature to about 195, and the steam keeps the salmon moist while it finishes. It will be fully cooked after 1:30 to 2 minutes in the steam. The liquid that remains in the pan is butter, olive oil, and fish oil, with flavor enhanced by the evaporated sherry. Use it as sauce to drizzle over the salmon when you plate it.

For super-moist salmon, plate it after the first 1:30 in the steam. Some pieces will not be fully cooked (darker center) as you remove them from the skillet, but the residual heat will finish cooking them in the time it takes to serve. When you break a piece with your fork, the color should be uniform.

For guests who prefer their salmon warm by rare in the center, remove those pieces after the pink-down first 1:36. Set them aside for the skin-down 1:36. Put them back for the final steaming in sherry.

You probably will not find salmon like this coming from a commercial kitchen. It's too fussy to do right on a busy line. Someone needs to watch over it start-to-finish.