

EASY SALMON CAKES WITH SMOKED SALMON, CAPERS, AND DILL

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WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

We wanted our salmon cakes recipe to be simple to prepare, so we broke out our food processor. Pulsing small pieces of salmon allowed for more even chopping and resulted in small, discrete pieces of fish. We also found a way to ditch the egg and flour steps of the breading process in our salmon cakes recipe. Instead, we coated the salmon cakes with panko, which we also used to bind our salmon cakes.

SERVES 4

If buying a skin-on salmon fillet, purchase 1 1/3 pounds of fish. This will yield 1 1/4 pounds of fish after skinning. When processing the salmon it is OK to have some pieces that are larger than 1/4 inch. It is important to avoid overprocessing the fish. Serve the salmon cakes with lemon wedges and/or tartar sauce.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tablespoons plus 3/4 cup panko bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
- 4 ounces finely chopped smoked salmon
- 1 tablespoon chopped capers
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 4 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 scallion, sliced thin
- 1 small shallot, minced
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 (1 pound) skinless salmon fillet, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine 3 tablespoons panko, dill, capers, smoked salmon, mayonnaise, lemon juice, scallion, shallot, mustard, salt, pepper, and cayenne in bowl. Working in 3 batches, pulse salmon in food processor until coarsely chopped into 1/4-inch pieces, about 2 pulses, transferring each batch to bowl with panko mixture. Gently mix until uniformly combined.
2. Place remaining 3/4 cup panko in pie plate. Using 1/3-cup measure, scoop level amount of salmon mixture and transfer to baking sheet; repeat to make 8 cakes. Carefully coat each cake in bread crumbs, gently patting into disk measuring 2 3/4 inches in diameter and 1 inch high. Return coated cakes to baking sheet.
3. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Place salmon cakes in skillet and cook without moving until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Carefully flip cakes and cook until second side is golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer cakes to paper towel-lined plate to drain 1 minute. Serve.

STEP-BY-STEP

SOMETHING'S FISHY

As we developed our recipe for salmon cakes, we experimented with different ways of preparing the fish. During testing, we noticed that sometimes the fish smelled (and tasted) far fishier than other times. Could the way we cooked the fish be the cause?

EXPERIMENT

We made salmon cakes three ways: with flaked precooked fish that we then pan-fried, with chopped raw fish that we baked in the oven, and with chopped raw fish seared until just cooked through.

RESULTS

The twice-cooked cakes had the strongest odor and flavor, with the baked cakes a close second. The pan-seared cakes were the mildest.

EXPLANATION

First, it helps to know that there are two different kinds of “fishy”: One is a sign of spoilage; the other is an indication of the presence of healthy fats. The flesh of all fish contains an odorless, nonvolatile chemical called trimethylamine oxide (or TMAO). During storage, bacteria on the surface of the raw fish convert TMAO into a volatile compound called trimethylamine (TMA), which produces the unmistakable smell of rotten fish.

The fishy smell of cooked salmon (and other fatty fish such as mackerel and tuna) comes from a different source. Salmon fat is highly unsaturated, which makes it susceptible to oxidation when cooked. Oxidation causes the breakdown of the fatty acids into strong-smelling aldehydes, which are the source of salmon’s characteristic flavor. Cooking the salmon twice resulted in very thoroughly cooked fish and, thus, a high level of aldehydes. Baking the cakes had a similar effect because the ambient heat of the oven cooked the fish more thoroughly than the stove did. The pan-fried cakes were mildest because the least amount of the fat had oxidized. In sum: Fish shouldn’t smell “fishy” when raw; if it does, don’t buy it. And for the mildest flavor, cook salmon and other fatty fish as briefly as possible.

TECHNIQUE

THREE EASY STEPS TO CRISPY SALMON CAKES

- 1. CHOP INTO PIECES** Hand-chop fish into 1-inch pieces before adding them to food processor. Any bigger and you’ll end up with some large chunks and some finely ground paste.
 - 2. PULSE INTO BITS** To ensure that pieces grind evenly, pulse chopped fish in 3 batches into 1/4-inch bits. (Be careful not to overprocess.) Mix with bread-crumbs binder and flavorings.
 - 3. COAT** Gently coat shaped cakes in coarse panko bread crumbs. Salmon’s high concentration of water-soluble proteins glues crumbs to patties without need for egg or flour.
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