

Salmon Fillet with Shallot and Basil Sauce

Notes:

The beauty of this recipe is that it can be on the table within 35 minutes of starting preparation, or about five minutes less if one microwaves the potatoes. The various stages of preparation and cooking all fall into a natural sequence, so that the cook, while busy, never has to do two things at once.

Ingredients (per person):

About 150gm salmon fillet

2 medium shallots, or 1½ if they are large ones

5–10gm fresh basil

Half a wineglassful (75ml) full bodied white wine (reduce to 50ml after the first two persons)

Half a wineglassful (75ml) double cream (reduce to 50ml after the first two persons)

Herbes de Provence, salt, pepper, and olive oil as required

Method:

Inspect the salmon fillets for bones by feeling with the finger tips, and pull out any that are found with stout tweezers, or a small pair of pliers. Wrap them in foil parcels with a little olive oil and a generous sprinkling of Herbes de Provence; alternatively they can be cooked in a shallow closed Pyrex dish. Remove the skins from the shallots, divide or slice them in half to give a flat surface to make slicing easier, and slice them thinly. Put the fillet parcel(s) in an oven at 180°C for 18 minutes, or 22 minutes if in a dish. Heat a little oil in a frying pan, and fry the shallots carefully until they are transparent, taking care not to brown them. Meanwhile take the required quantity of basil leaves, compress them into a small sausage between your fingers and slice thinly: this is much quicker than chopping them, and just as effective. As a guide, I find that 5gm is the equivalent of a rounded teaspoonful when compressed in this way. When the shallots are ready, add the white wine, the cream, and the basil, add a small amount of salt and a rather more generous amount of black pepper, stir well and bring to the boil. Turn down the heat as required, and allow the liquid to reduce and thicken until it begins to boil rather like porridge; it is desirable to recognise this condition early, while there is still a reasonable amount of liquid, because if heating is prolonged it will look like this until it dries up. If all has gone well the fillets and the sauce should be ready simultaneously, Open the parcel(s), or the dish, serve the fillets with a fish slice, aiming to leave the skins behind, and spoon the sauce over them.

I like to serve this dish with new potatoes and broccoli. The timing works out well if the potatoes are put on to steam right at the beginning, and the broccoli is cooked in the microwave in a closed container with a little water for about four minutes, while the sauce is reducing. This is the best way I know to cook broccoli – it comes out a beautiful green colour, and just slightly firm.