

Food & Drink

Think pink -- it's salmon time

The summer season of salmon is about to begin.

These days the word 'salmon' may make you think about the west coast salmon wars, but politics aside, salmon is a perfect food for barbecuing, baking or even microwaving.

And you can stock up on a supply of your favorite salmon and keep it in the freezer.

While everyone has their own preferred ways of home-freezing, here are some proven methods from the B.C. Salmon Marketing Council you might try when freezing salmon.

By following these easy methods, you and your family can enjoy salmon -- the "taste of summer" -- throughout the year.

Just remember the two cardinal rules: start with the freshest high-quality salmon possible, and use methods which keep the moisture in and the air out.

"The fresher the better" for successful freezing means salmon should be frozen immediately after purchase.

If you have any doubts about quality or freshness, don't bother freezing it.

If you are starting with a whole salmon, make sure that it is rinsed clean of blood and viscera before freezing.

If freezing portions, package steaks and fillets individually or layer them with waxed paper in between for easier separation.

Wrapping well is the secret to keeping moisture in and air out. The trick is to double- or even triple-wrap salmon, choosing a strong inner wrap (such as plastic wrap or wet paper towels). Then wrap again with aluminum foil or freezer paper or use a heavy self-sealing bag before labelling and freezing.

Keep your salmon in the coldest part of the freezer directly against the freezer floor and wall and further away from the freezer door or lid so that it receives the least amount of exposure to warmer air when the freezer is opened.

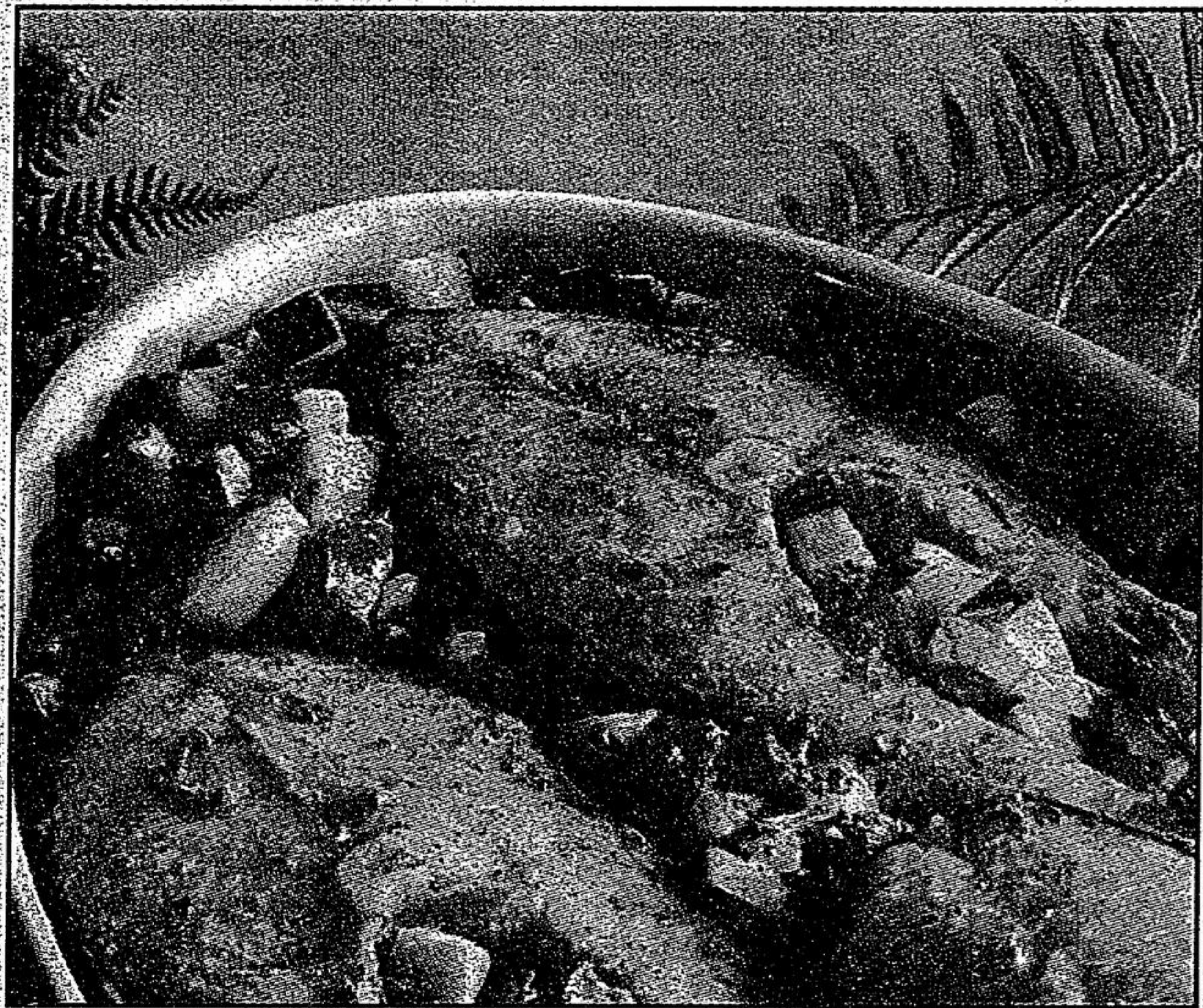
Keep fish frozen at a constant temperature of 0 degrees F (-18 degrees C) or colder.

Smaller packages freeze faster and better than large ones, so consider dividing a large fish into portions. Never freeze salmon that has been previously frozen and thawed.

Salmon frozen at home will keep well in the freezer for about two months; after that its flavor and nutritional value will start to deteriorate.

If you plan to keep it longer than two months, follow the glazing method outlined below.

When ready to use your frozen salmon, thaw it in the refrigerator in original wrapping, or thaw faster under cold running water, or defrost in microwave four to five minutes/lb. (500 g), followed by equal standing time.



SUCCULENT SALMON:

Try this appetizing and healthy recipe, Baked Salmon Steaks with Ginger Ratatouille. It only takes about 20 minutes to prepare and is a favorite recipe of Joe Bauer, a fisherman from B.C. The B.C. salmon-fishing season is just starting, guaranteeing a fresh supply of succulent salmon in five varieties all summer. Salmon is best served fresh, but can also be stored in the freezer for up to two months.

FREEZING METHODS:

• Layer wrapping

Wet salmon, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, wrap again with foil, and then freeze.

Or, completely wrap fish in paper towels, then thoroughly wet the towels with cold water. Wrap the fish in two layers of newspaper and completely wet the newspaper with cold water.

Finally wrap the entire "package" in heavy-duty aluminum foil and then freeze.

• Storing in heavy plastic self-sealing bag

Wet each fresh salmon portion, place in a heavy plastic self-sealing bag, and seal with all air removed.

You will prevent freezer burn by making sure the bag is air-tight so push or suck all the air out before sealing the bag.

Or, try this method: immerse the bag in a container of water up to the sealing strip and until all air is forced out. Then seal the bag and place in freezer.

• Milk carton method

Place fresh salmon portions in milk carton, fill with water, seal so container is air-tight and freeze.

• Glazing

Freeze fish as quickly as possible by placing fish portions (ie steaks, fillets) on cookie sheet, cover with wax paper or foil, and place in freezer.

When fish is solidly frozen,

quickly dip each portion into a container of ice-cold water so it is completely frozen. An ice coating will automatically form.

Place the portions back in the freezer uncovered for another 10 or 20 minutes.

Repeat dipping and freezing procedure about five or six times until a thick glaze - about 1/4 inch (1/2 cm) - has formed.

Wrap salmon portions air-tight in heavy plastic freezer wrap, or seal in a heavy plastic self-sealing bag and place in the freezer.

When you're ready to prepare the salmon, try one of these mouth-watering recipes below from the B.C. Salmon Marketing Council.

Tips on buying fish fresh

If you're looking for something different to make for dinner which is low in fat, but high in protein, salmon is the way to go.

There are five different species: Chinook, Chum, Coho, Sockeye and Pink.

Each variety offers a unique flavor and a variety of usages.

Chinook, also known as King or Spring salmon, is one of the most flavorful of the British Columbia species and comes fresh, frozen or smoked.

Chum is mild in flavor and is called Keta when canned.

Coho salmon is full-flavored and fine-textured and is sold fresh, frozen, canned and smoked.

Sockeye is as flavorful as Chinook and is sold by the can as well as fresh, smoked and frozen.

Pink salmon is delicate in flavor and texture and comes fresh, frozen and canned.

Salmon is best if you purchase it fresh. Before buying it, read the following tips provided by the B.C. Salmon Market-



Food for Thought

Lisa Cartwright

ing Council.

• Try to purchase your salmon the day you are going to serve it.

• The flesh should be firm and moist without being watery.

• Press the flesh of the fish next to the backbone and watch how the quickly the dimple disappears. The fresher the fish, the faster the flesh springs back.

• Look for moist and translucent flesh.

• Don't purchase a fish which appears bruised or spotted.

• When purchasing whole fish, make sure the eyes are clean and shiny and not sunken.

• Fresh salmon should smell clean and never fishy. Fish sitting in a puddle of liquid means it has been around too long.

• Purchase fish displayed on ice from a reliable grocery store with a knowledgeable staff.

BAKED SALMON STEAKS WITH GINGER RATATOUILLE

- 1 tbs olive oil
- 1 small onion, sliced thinly
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbs finely-chopped fresh ginger
- 1/2 cup ea. diced eggplant, zucchini and red pepper
- 1 large tomato, seeded and diced
- salt and freshly-ground pepper, to taste
- 1 tsp butter
- 4 salmon steaks, about 1" (2.5 cm) thick
- 2 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 2 tbs chopped fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (180 degrees C). In large skillet heat oil over medium-high heat; add onion, garlic and ginger, and cook, stirring, until onions are soft. Add the eggplant, zucchini and peppers, lower heat and cook gently for another 7-8 minutes until vegetables are just tender; stir in tomatoes, season with salt and pepper; set aside.

Butter a shallow baking dish and place salmon steaks so they are not touching; pour lemon juice over salmon. Spoon reserved ratatouille over and around the salmon steaks; cover dish tightly with foil. Bake for 20 minutes or until salmon flakes easily when pressed with a fork. Garnish with parsley.

Preparation time: 30 minutes. Baking time: 20 minutes. Serves four.

RECIPES

'THE ONLY' BBQ SALMON

- 1 1/2 lbs salmon fillets
- 8 large garlic cloves
- 1 tsp salt
- 4 tbs finely-chopped parsley
- 2 tbs finely-minced sun-dried tomatoes
- 1/4 cup olive oil

Chop the garlic cloves finely, sprinkle with salt and grind together with the flat of a knife. Combine with the parsley, tomatoes and olive oil and store, covered, in the refrigerator overnight.

Prepare the barbecue and oil the grill to help prevent the salmon from sticking.

With a sharp knife, cut two lengthwise slits in the fillet, being careful to cut to, but not through, the skin. Spread half the garlic mixture over the fillet and into the slits. Place skin side down on the barbecue grill at low temperature. Close lid and barbecue for 10-15 minutes.

Spread remaining garlic mixture over the fillet; close the lid, increase temperature to medium, and cook another 15 minutes or until the flesh separates into natural moist sections when pressed with a fork.

Preparation time: overnight. Cooking time: 30 minutes. Serves four.