

CRISPY SALMON WITH LEMON, PINE NUTS, AND WILTED BUTTER LETTUCE

Serves 2

2 (5-ounce) skin-on salmon fillets

Kosher salt

1 cup torn bread, soaked in water to cover

½ cup pine nuts

¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon

1 clove garlic

1 head butter lettuce, cored and cut into 1-inch-wide strips

1 cup fresh or frozen peas

Daniel developed this dish for the winter menu at the Inn of the Seventh Ray, a creek-side fine-dining restaurant in Los Angeles. This recipe employs two lesser-utilized techniques: cooking lettuce and blending bread. Gently sautéing lettuce brings out the sweetness in the leafy vegetable and offers a refreshing crunch, which pairs beautifully with the earthy and acidic pine nut sauce. And blending bread soaked in water works to emulsify the sauce, giving it a rich and creamy texture akin to a Caesar dressing. The technique works as a thickener for soups as well and is a great use for stale bread.

1. Season each salmon fillet on both sides with ½ teaspoon salt.
2. To make the sauce, drain the bread and add to a blender along with ¼ cup of the pine nuts, ½ cup of the oil, the lemon juice, garlic, and 1½ teaspoons salt. Blend until smooth, adding a few tablespoons water if necessary to achieve a thick, pourable consistency. Set aside.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon of the remaining oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat until it just begins to smoke. Pat the salmon fillets dry with a paper towel and then gently lower them, skin side down, into the pan, dropping them away from you so as not to splash any hot oil toward you. Lower the heat to medium and cook until the skin is crispy, about 4 minutes. Flip the fillets and continue cooking until just cooked through, about 2 minutes, depending on thickness.
4. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, mix together the remaining ¼ cup pine nuts, the remaining 3 tablespoons oil, the lemon zest, and a pinch of salt and reserve.
5. Transfer the salmon to a plate. Add the lettuce, peas, and a pinch of salt to the pan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until just warmed and wilted.
6. Divide the wilted lettuce mixture between individual plates. Place the fish on the lettuce, then spoon the pine nut sauce over the top. Garnish with the lemony pine nuts and oil.