

魚の桜蒸し *Sakana no Sakura-Mushi* Cherry-Steamed Fish



In Japan, where *sashimi*-grade fillets of skinless fish called *saku* are readily available, that is my first choice for fish when making this dish. *Tai* (snapper), *suzuki* (seabass) or *hiramé* (flounder) are especially wonderful prepared this way. When in America or Europe, I look for flounder or sole (in colder weather, halibut) though cod or scrod are fine, too. A similar dish can be made with *tôfu*, wrapping blocks in salt-cured cherry leaves before steaming in parchment packets.

Serves FOUR:

- 4 pieces fish (such as snapper or bass), skinned fillets, each about 100 grams (3.5 oz)
- 2 tablespoons *saké* to “rinse” fish in preparation for steaming
- 4 sheets parchment, each twice the size of the piece of fish to be wrapped
- 8 salt-cured cherry leaves (see **KITCHEN NOTES**)
- 4 pieces *kombu* (kelp), each about 1-inch/2 cm long
- 12 or more salt-preserved cherry blossoms (see **KITCHEN NOTES**)

Make 4 packages of fish:

Lay four pieces of parchment paper on your cutting board or kitchen counter top. Each piece of paper should be about twice the size of the fish to be wrapped in it.

Place two salt-preserved cherry leaves in the center of each piece of parchment. Lay a piece of kelp on top of the leaves. Briefly dip each piece of fish in the *saké* before laying it over the kelp and leaves. The leaves and kelp prevent the fish from sticking to the parchment, and lend a pleasant floral (for the cherry blossoms) and seashore (for the kelp) aroma to the finished dish. Garnish with a few salt-cured blossoms.





Close the packets and place them in a steamer over a steady stream of steam. Cover & steam for 7-8 minutes.

Serve piping hot. As each dinner carefully opens his/her parchment packet at table, incredible aroma is released, and the briny-delicious juices of the fish that are trapped inside make for moist, succulent fish.

KITCHEN NOTES

Blossoms and leaves are sold in vacuum-sealed bags; the blossoms are sometimes sold in glass jars. The intense cherry aroma is due to naturally occurring chemical compound called **coumarin**.

Consumed in large quantities coumarin can be mildly toxic to humans, though many practitioners of *kampōyaku*, Japan's herbal medicine, make use of coumarin's anticoagulant properties. The aroma dissipates quickly after opening packages of salt-cured flowers and/or leaves so it is best to transfer unused blossoms or leaves to a container that can be sealed tightly. Refrigerate after opening.



When ready to use your salt-cured cherry blossoms, shake off loose crystals of salt from the preserved blossoms. **SAVE** this salt! If the blossoms seem thickly crusted with salt, you can use gentle rubbing motions to help remove the excess. Set aside this fragrant salt and use it as a finishing-salt for grilled fish, meat or vegetables.