

SMART Angler's Notebook

by Carl Richardson

This article isn't about what steelhead do to your reel's drag, even though they do put you and your equipment to the test. It's about smoking steelhead, or any trout species, for that matter.

Smoking is a great way to preserve fish. Our ancestors smoked or dried fish long before they used preservation methods. Smoked fish is a great holiday or winter treat.

Try these recipes and tips next time you get some steelhead or have some trout in the freezer.

Preparation

Fillets with skin on work best. Cut larger fillets (bigger than a typical meal portion) into smaller pieces (strips no more than 3 or 4 inches wide and a half-inch thick). Try to keep all pieces the same size, or be prepared to take smaller pieces out earlier than larger ones.

Brine

Brine is the salt solution that cures the fish. To enhance the flavor, spices and flavors can be added to plain salt. Like all recipes, you can experiment.

Smoking/cooking

Most modern smokers serve two purposes—to generate smoke and cook the fish. It's important that the fish's internal temperature rises above 165 degrees. Most smokers/cookers don't smoke



photo-Joe Workosky

Brine solution

- ✓ 1/3-cup brown sugar
- ✓ 1/4-cup non-iodized salt
- ✓ 2 cups soy sauce—use less to cut back on sodium
- ✓ 1 cup water
- ✓ 1/2-tsp. onion powder
- ✓ 1/2-tsp. garlic powder
- ✓ 1/2-tsp. fresh ground black pepper
- ✓ 1/2-tsp. hot sauce
- ✓ 1 cup dry white wine (substitute apple cider, if you wish)

Mix brine solution ingredients. Place fish pieces into a glass container and cover with the brine solution. Soak at least overnight in the refrigerator, up to 24 hours. Wash the brine off pieces and pat dry or place on racks. Let sit for one hour before smoking or until the surface has a tacky, glazed appearance. Then smoke to taste.

Dry brine recipe

- ✓ 2 lbs. brown sugar
- ✓ 1 cup pickling salt
- ✓ 1 tbsp. Old Bay seasoning

You can use this dry brine recipe in place of the first brine solution. Mix ingredients. Layer dry brine, fillets, dry brine, etc. Store in refrigerator at least 12 hours up to 24 hours (unused dry brine can be stored indefinitely in a plastic bag). Wash the brine off pieces and pat dry or place on racks. Let sit for one hour before smoking or until the surface has a tacky, glazed appearance. Then smoke to taste.

during the entire cooking cycle. That is, they smoke for about an hour or two, depending on how much wood chips or chunks you use. The rest of the time they cook the fish.

Hickory or alder is the wood traditionally used. But you can get a unique flavor with cherry or apple, or mixing varieties. My favorite is hickory.

Whole trout fillets or small steelhead fillets should be smoked/cooked for at least 5 hours, with some taking as long as 8 hours. Larger, whole steelhead fillets (thicker than a half-inch) will need at least 10 hours, maybe 12 or longer.

Smoked fish keeps for at least four weeks, if it lasts that long. Smoked fish can be flaked and made into dips or cakes, or it can be eaten with crackers. ☐

photo-Wayne Phillips

