

Hearty cod and cilantro broth

Açorda de bacalhau

Serves 2

For the cured cod

7 tablespoons/90 g superfine sugar

3 1/2 tablespoons/60 g fine sea salt

Aromatics of your choice, such as bay

leaves, coriander seeds, cilantro, parsley, orange and lemon zest, fennel seeds, black peppercorns, and perhaps a cinnamon stick for warmth

2 (5-ounce/150 g) skinless, pinboned cod fillets of an even thickness (the top, fatter part of the loin is ideal)

For the cod broth

2 tablespoons olive oil

7 ounces/200 g cod trimmings (ask your fishmonger)

2 garlic cloves, crushed

For the açorda

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 garlic cloves, crushed

A small bunch of cilantro, stalks finely chopped and leaves picked

Flaky sea salt and ground white pepper

2 slices sourdough or other rustic loaf

A handful of mint leaves

Extra-virgin olive oil, to serve

***Açorda* was invented during times of deep poverty, when ingredients had to be stretched in unfathomable ways.**

But despite its frugality, it's a soup we Portuguese truly love. A pan of fish stock mixed with garlic, cilantro, and olive oil, poured over a nice piece of cod and a slice of stale sourdough bread, is a brilliant example of how simple yet full of flavor our cooking can be.

I love to cure fish because it draws the moisture out of the flesh, which means it has a nicer texture and cooks more evenly. I use a ratio of 6 parts sugar to 4 parts salt (by weight), which enhances the natural sweetness of the fish. You can also add other flavorings, depending on the final dish (see left for suggestions). The possibilities are endless, so experiment! You could try curing halibut, bream, bass, mackerel, or sole and matching them with different seasonings.

To cure the cod — Whisk together the sugar, salt, and aromatics, ensuring they are well combined. Spread half the cure over the bottom of a small baking sheet. Put the fish on top and cover with the remaining cure. Set aside for 20 to 30 minutes at room temperature. It's worth checking sooner than you expect, rather than overcuring it; it should feel tighter and firmer. Rinse off the cure and pat dry with paper towels.

To make the cod broth — Heat the olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Add the cod trimmings, garlic, and 1 quart/1 L water, then simmer gently for 20 to 30 minutes. Remove from the heat, cover, and leave to infuse for another 30 minutes.

To make the açorda — Heat the olive oil in a pan over low heat. Add the garlic and cilantro stalks and cook gently for 5 minutes, until soft and fragrant. Season with salt and pepper. Pour in the cod broth and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low, add the cured cod, and poach for 5 minutes, until just starting to flake gently apart. Stir in the cilantro leaves and taste for seasoning. Toast the bread. To serve, place a slice of toast in each bowl with a few mint leaves on top. Spoon the cod and broth over the toast, adding a little more broth than you think you need, as the bread will absorb a lot. Drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil and serve.



Reprinted with permission from *My Lisbon* by João Mendes, copyright © 2018. Photography by Andrew Montgomery. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House.