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Cedar Plank Salmon with Hibiscus

SERVES 4 TO 6

It's easy to make perfectly smoked salmon just with your grill—all you need are some wood chunks/chips, a cedar plank, and a charcoal fire ready to go. Smoking doesn't have to take hours, especially for oily fish like salmon, which absorbs the smoky vapors readily. The low heat guarantees the salmon will be perfectly pink in the center and not dried out. You also need to be sure to take the salmon off the grill to rest periodically. If you grill often, you likely are familiar with cedar planks, which impart a woody, robust flavor to salmon and solve the problem of the fish falling apart and through the grates. You can pick up cedar planks in grilling and kitchen stores, or order them online. Be sure to soak the plank in water to prevent it from burning on the grill. In this dish, the floral essence of the hibiscus rub counterbalances the fatty richness of salmon. Serve with Grilled Asparagus with Chopped Egg Vinaigrette or a simple butter lettuce salad.

Special Equipment:

3 applewood or cherrywood chunks or 4 large handfuls (about 2 cups) chips, and 1 cedar grilling plank

1½ to 2 pounds skinless center-cut salmon fillet, preferably wild, pin bones removed

¼ cup Hibiscus Flower Rub (*see recipe below*)

10 fresh thyme sprigs

1. Lay the salmon in a medium baking dish and sprinkle the top with the hibiscus flower rub. Refrigerate, uncovered, for 2 to 4 hours. Take the fish out of the refrigerator about 30 minutes before cooking so it can come up to room temperature.
2. Fill a bowl with cool water and toss in the thyme for added flavor and fragrance. Put the cedar plank in the water, weighing it down with a heavy can or skillet to keep it submerged. Soak for 1 hour; this will help preserve the cedar plank because the water saturation will make it less likely to burn and will also impart moisture to keep the salmon from drying out.
3. Prepare and preheat the grill to 250 to 300°F, following the [grill-smoking method](#). Distribute one-third of the wood chips or 1 chunk evenly in the coals and close the lid. Adjust the vents to maintain 250 to 300°F. Remove the cedar plank from the water and lay the salmon on top, rub-side up.
4. Place the plank with the salmon on the grill grate. Close the lid and let smoke for 5 minutes. Transfer the plank with salmon to a side table to rest for 3 minutes; be sure to close the grill lid to maintain the temperature and smoke. Open the lid, sprinkle in another third of the wood chips or 1 more chunk, and put the plank with salmon back on the grill. Close the lid and smoke for another 5 minutes. Remove the plank with salmon again to rest for 3 minutes. Add the final batch of wood chips or last chunk and return the salmon to the grill for 4 minutes. Repeat the resting and smoking process one last time (not adding chips/chunk in the final stage) for 4 minutes. The smoking process takes about 18 minutes, plus resting stages in between. The salmon should be between medium-rare and medium and pink in the center.
5. Allow the salmon to rest for 5 minutes before cutting. Serve the smoked salmon directly on the cedar plank.

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Hibiscus Flower Rub

MAKES 1 CUP

Reminiscent of cranberries and pomegranate in their tartness and color, hibiscus are dried deep red- violet flowers with a tangy, berry-like flavor. Also called Jamaica in Spanish, hibiscus is a beloved agua fresco beverage featured in toquerias and Latin markets (where it is often sold in bags with other spices and herbs). The floral fruitiness of hibiscus is well balanced by the assertive, yet nuanced, variety of peppercorns. This rub is exceptional on fish (see Cedar Plank Salmon with Hibiscus, page 202), but also brightens the flavor of snapper, scallops, and lobster.

- 10 Javanese long peppers (*see Note below*)
- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- 2 teaspoons whole pink peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon whole green peppercorns
- ½ cup dried hibiscus flowers
- ¼ cup packed light brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons fine sea salt
- 2 teaspoons sweet paprika
- 1 teaspoon Piment d'Espelette (*see Note, below*) or cayenne

1. Heat a dry sauté pan over medium-low heat and add the Javanese peppers and all the peppercorns. Toast until fragrant, shaking the pan periodically to prevent scorching, about 5 minutes. Spoon the toasted peppercorns into a clean spice grinder or coffee mill. Add the hibiscus flowers. Grind until the mixture is a semi-coarse powder
2. Pour the pepper mixture into a small mixing bowl. Add the brown sugar, salt, paprika, and Piment d'Espelette. Stir to fully incorporate and distribute the ingredients. This may be stored in a covered container at room temperature (away from the heat of the stove) for up to 3 months.

Ingredient Note: Javanese Long Pepper

Javanese long pepper also known as Indonesian long pepper, these long, pine cone-looking peppercorns have a complex flavor all their own. Their warm, fruity-musky aroma has hints of nutmeg and cinnamon without being overly spicy. The Javanese long pepper's distinctive, floral quality is the perfect counterpoint to hibiscus flowers and elevates this rub into something extra special. You can find them in gourmet markets or online.

Ingredient Note: Piment d'Espelette

Piment d'espelette or espelette pepper, is a long red pepper cultivated in the Basque region of France that is mostly available dried. About the same heat scale as hot paprika or cayenne, espelette pepper lends a not-too-hot, fruity finish too many recipes. You may substitute cayenne, if desired, but I highly recommend adding this amazing spice to your cupboard.

