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Seared Sea Scallops

SERVES 4

I love preparing scallops in the summer when I don't want to spend a lot of time cooking a large protein. The trick to this dish is searing the scallops properly to develop a sweet, umami-rich crust. If they don't sizzle the second they hit the pan, you're probably crowding them or your pan isn't hot enough. Stop and wait for the pan to reach the ideal temperature before continuing, rather than ruin your chances at achieving golden perfection.

When shopping for scallops, look for large, fresh sea scallops (the bigger, the better) that haven't been soaked in the phosphate solution that's often used to preserve and plump them. If you're not sure, ask your fishmonger if the scallops have been treated. I like to cook scallops about halfway through, so there's a hint of translucence when you cut into the center. The texture can turn rubbery when overcooked, and a medium-rare finish allows the delicate flavor of the scallop to shine through.

12 large sea scallops
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
4 lemon wedges, seeded
Edible flowers, for garnish (optional)

Remove the side muscle, or foot, of each scallop (it looks like a baby scallop and easily pulls away) if necessary and carefully examine all of the scallops to ensure no grains of sand are present. Gently rinse the scallops in cold water and pat very dry with a paper towel. Season the scallops evenly on both sides with the salt and pepper.

Heat a black steel pan over high heat until very hot. Add the oil and heat until the surface is rippling but not smoking. Pour off any excess oil; there should be only a thin, even film of oil on the pan. Add half of the scallops at once. The scallops should audibly sizzle as soon as you place them in the pan. If they don't, quickly pull the scallops out and wait for the pan to get hotter. Press down firmly with a fish spatula (see page 373) to ensure even browning. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, until the scallops have a nice, golden brown surface on the underside. If your scallops are crowded or the pan isn't hot enough, they will not develop this surface.

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Flip the scallops and press down again with the spatula to ensure as much surface contact as possible. Cook for 45 seconds to 1 1/2 minutes, depending on the thickness of the scallops. When the second sides are golden brown, remove the pan from the heat. The whole process should take 2 to 3 minutes. When you cut into a scallop, it should not be cooked all the way through; the middle third should still be translucent.

To serve with **Basil Pistou** (See [Walnut-Parsley Pistou recipe](#); make the [Basil Pistou](#) variation) and **Half-Dried Tomatoes** (recipe follows), dollop 5 or 6 generous tablespoons of the pistou on a platter and arrange 4 to 6 scallops on top. Scatter 15 to 20 tomatoes around the scallops and squeeze the lemon wedges over the top. Garnish with the edible flowers. (I like to serve this dish family-style, assembling at least a couple of platters, but if you're plating individual portions, use about 2 tablespoons pistou, 3 scallops, and a small handful of cherry tomatoes per plate.)

Half-Dried Tomatoes

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

These bright, acidic cherry tomatoes add a burst of color and flavor to everything from scrambled eggs to Crème Fraîche Tarts or Seared Sea Scallops.

2 pints cherry tomatoes

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 1/2 teaspoons finely minced summer savory or thyme

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Cut the tomatoes in half crosswise. Place the tomatoes, cut side up, on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet. Drizzle with the oil and sprinkle with the salt, pepper, and savory. Roast for 45 minutes to 1 hour, until the tomatoes are beginning to color on their edges and have lost about half of their moisture. The tomatoes will keep, covered with plastic wrap at room temperature, for up to 1 day.

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