

Grilled Sardines

Kick the can. Fresh sardines are having their day and shaking off a bad reputation. In Portugal, where an astonishing number of these little guys are consumed, they are often simply grilled and finished with lemon juice. No less complementary than butter to bread or salt to tomatoes, the combination of lemon and sardines is perfect for its simplicity. And don't fear the bones. After grilling, they'll pull off the flesh fairly easily.

See Cook's Notes on how to wash a large amount of herbs and fillet cooked sardines.

Ingredients

salad

4 plum tomatoes, seeded, diced ¼-inch, about 1½ cups
1/4 of large red onion, very thinly sliced, about 1 cup
1 cup packed fresh cilantro leaves, coarsely chopped
1 large lemon, halved
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

sardines

4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
12 fresh sardines (about 2 pounds), cleaned, heads and tails on

special equipment

charcoal or gas grill
tongs

Directions

For the salad

Put the tomatoes, onion and cilantro in a medium bowl and cover lightly with a damp paper towel while you grill the sardines.

For the sardines

Prepare the grill for direct high heat.

Stir together the oil, paprika and salt in a small bowl. Wash the sardines under cold running water, then drain and pat dry. Brush the skin and cavities with the seasoned oil.

Grill the sardines until they no longer stick to the grate and the skin chars, 2 to 3 minutes. Flip the sardines and add the lemon halves to the grill, cut side down.

In about 2 minutes, check the lemons and remove them if they're warm and the flesh has taken some grill marks. Continue to grill the sardines until charred, 1 to 2 minutes longer.

Squeeze one of the grilled lemons over the sardines, and add the juice from the other

lemon half to the salad bowl, along with oil and salt and toss to combine.

Spread the salad out on a platter and top with the sardines.

Cook's Notes

To make sure your cilantro is clean, swish the bunch around in a large bowl of cold water, then lift out and spin it dry in a salad spinner with a few pieces of torn paper towel.

Impress your friends: To fillet cooked sardines, lay the fish flat, run a sharp knife down the spine and stomach of the fish on one side of the fillet. Detach the fillet from the head and tail. Gently wiggle your knife from tail end toward the head of the fish. Angle your knife to lightly scrape the spine beneath the fillet. The fillet will lift away relatively easily. Set the first fillet aside. Pick up the skeleton from the tail and remove it from the bottom fillet.

total time: 40 minutes

active prep: 40 minutes

serves: 4

difficulty: *easy*