

Smoked Whitefish Rillettes

Smoked whitefish, the somewhat forgotten hero of Eastern European cuisine, often plays second fiddle to the sexier, smoother, more popular lox (smoked salmon). Rich, savory and satisfying with smoky overtones that acquiesce when mixed with cream and herbs, it's a wonder it ever falls out of favor. Here, smoked whitefish asserts its place at the table of deliciousness, edging its way back in the form of a rilette — ready to impress the masses once again.

A classic method of preserving meat before refrigeration existed, rillettes were typically made from chopped pork slow-cooked in its own fat and then sealed with another layer of fat for protection. Nowadays, all manner of proteins are used, like ours here with smoked whitefish. Since the fish is already prepared and flavorful, it simply gets mixed with mascarpone cheese and herbs before being packed under clarified butter.

Ingredients

clarified butter

2 sticks unsalted butter

rillettes

1 cup smoked whitefish fillet, flaked, skin removed, picked over for any bones (about 6 ounces)

2 tablespoons mascarpone, softened

1 tablespoon minced shallots

1 tablespoon lemon zest (from 1 lemon)

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon salt, or more to taste

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

2 teaspoons minced fresh chives

1 teaspoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 teaspoon chopped fresh dill

for serving

half-sour pickles, sliced

prepared red horseradish

matzoh

special equipment

1 large crock or 2 smaller ramekins

Directions

for the butter

Place butter in a small saucepan and melt over low to medium heat. Lightly simmer until it separates, about 5 minutes. Skim the foam from the top and pour the butter slowly through a strainer lined with cheesecloth, stopping short of the solids left in the bottom of the pot. Set aside while preparing the rillettes. You will have a little more than you need.

for the rillettes

| A stand mixer with a paddle attachment to combine the ingredients, or do it by hand with a medium bowl and rubber spatula. Place the whitefish in a bowl and break up any chunks into smaller flakes, no larger than an inch. Add the mascarpone, shallots, lemon zest and juice, salt and pepper. Add 2 tablespoons of the slightly cooled clarified butter, and mix until combined and fish is broken up into small pieces. Add the herbs and mix until just incorporated. Taste for seasoning (depending on how strong and smokey your whitefish is, the mixture might need more salt). Scoop the rilletes into a large crock or a couple of ramekins and lightly pack down, smoothing the surface. Pour enough clarified butter over the rilletes to cover with a layer at least ¼-inch thick, then place in the refrigerator to cool. Use any extra butter for eggs, popcorn, crepes, etc.

Take out of the refrigerator 30 minutes before serving. Serve with half-sour pickles, red horseradish and matzoh.

Cook's Notes

Because of the butter seal, this can be made a few days ahead.

total time: 45 minutes, plus cooling time

active prep: 15 minutes

serves: 4 (1 to 1½ cups)

difficulty: *easy*