



Elegant Crusted Catfish with Lemon Browned Butter Drizzle

The secret step that makes this so delicious – brine the catfish

Brine Mixture Tip: *Prepare this mixture ahead of time*

3 cups water

1-1/2 Tablespoons granulated sugar

3 Tablespoons kosher salt

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 small clove garlic, sliced

1 bay leaf

1 whole small black peppercorn, crushed

1/4 teaspoon juniper berries, crushed

4 cups ice cubes

1/2 fresh small lemon, sliced

2 fresh dill sprigs

1/2 teaspoon dried or 1 fresh sprig oregano

In a large stockpot, bring water, sugar, salt, dried thyme, garlic, bay leaf, peppercorns and juniper berries to a rapid boil. Stir to completely dissolve sugar and salt. Remove from heat; stir in ice cubes, lemon, dill sprigs, and oregano. Cool completely in large bowl. Store in refrigerator until ready to use.

Prepare the Catfish:

- 2 large catfish fillets – (about 1-1/4 pounds fish)
- 1/2 cup yellow cornmeal
- 2 Tablespoons fine ground garlic butter croutons
- 1/4 cup canola oil or as needed
- 1-1/2 to 2 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stems removed, halved
- 1 lemon, cut in half

Rinse fish; place in prepared brine for 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.

After 2 hours, remove catfish from brine; pat dry with paper towel. Place cornmeal and fine ground croutons in 10-inch pie pan or dish. Press catfish firmly into cornmeal mixture to coat completely.

Heat 12-inch cast iron skillet over medium heat; add 2 Tablespoons oil to pan. Carefully add catfish fillets one at a time; cook about 4 minutes to brown first side; turn fish over. Set fish in skillet aside.

Place 1 Tablespoon oil into hot small skillet. Add mushrooms; sauté to 2 to 3 minutes. Place mushrooms into skillet with catfish; place in preheated 400-degree F oven to finish cooking for about 8 to 10 minutes.

For Garnish: Coat cut side of each lemon half into cornmeal; sauté in skillet until lightly golden, about 2 to 3 minutes. Remove; set aside.

Meanwhile Prepare Peppered Grits:

- 2 cups water
- 1/2 cup Quick 5-Minute Grits
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 Tablespoons minced chives
- 2 ounces Monterey Jack Pepper cheese, sliced

In a medium saucepan, bring water to brisk boil; stir in grits and salt. Reduce heat to medium low; cover; cook 5 to 7 minutes or until thickened,

stir occasionally. Remove from heat; stir in chives and cheese until melted. Set aside for serving.

Lemon Browned Butter:

1/4 cup unsalted butter, softened
1 Tablespoon lemon juice
Salt to taste

In small skillet, melt butter over medium heat; cook, stirring frequently until butter is golden brown. Remove from heat; whisk in lemon juice; season lightly with salt.

Add On – Garnish and Serving Ingredients:

1 small bunch watercress, trimmed
3 to 4 peppadew peppers, cut in half

To Serve: For each serving: Place large spoonful of grits in center of serving plate; top with one catfish fillet. Arrange mushrooms, watercress, peppadew peppers, and lemon half around fish. Drizzle fish with Lemon Browned Butter. Serve: 2

Cook's Note: This recipe looks like it might be hard to make. The actual cooking time for the entire dinner is only about 30 to 40 minutes. Preparation is simple if you have all your ingredients ready before you start cooking. If using frozen fish, make sure that the frozen fish doesn't already have salt added to it.

Recipe Inspired by: Chef Dean Neff in Southern Cast Iron booklet

About the Recipe: Using a non-stick cast iron skillet makes this recipe easy since you can brown the fish and then finish it in the oven using the same pan. Adding peppered grits with their zesty taste is balanced with the add-ons, mushrooms, watercress, and peppadew peppers. The final drizzle of brown butter with a touch of lemon creates an elegant dinner for that special occasion.