

Salmon in Phyllo with Champagne Cream Sauce – Comfort du Jour

If you think “elegant” and “easy” cannot co-exist in the kitchen, allow me to introduce you to this moist and flaky salmon, wrapped in layer upon layer of crispy buttery phyllo and topped with a champagne-and-cream sauce that sends it over the top. Impressive and fancy? Yes, but if you can use a paintbrush and wrap a small birthday gift, you have the skills to do this.

There is flexibility in this recipe, too. You can swap out the seasonings, use different fish and even change up the sauce if you want. Once you nail the technique of phyllo (which you will after this), there are many possibilities. Finally, whether you’ll be serving two people or eight, you’ll appreciate being able to prepare these cute little “packages” ahead of time and just pop them in the oven in time for dinner.

My recipe was for two servings. Adjust accordingly for extra portions.

INGREDIENTS

Fresh salmon fillets (5 oz. each), skin removed* (see notes)

Salt and pepper

Fresh or dried dill leaves

5 sheets phyllo dough*

1/2 stick salted butter, melted

1/2 cup champagne (or dry white wine, such as pinot grigio)

1 small shallot, finely minced*

Salt and pepper

1/2 cup half & half (or light cream)

1 1/2 tsp. all-purpose flour

2 tsp. Dijon mustard

A couple of pinches of white pepper

*NOTES

If your supermarket offers pre-portioned salmon fillets, that’s a good way to go. Ideally, you want the skin removed from the fish (they will usually do this for you at the fish counter, but I explain how to do it yourself).

Any kind of salmon (sockeye, king, coho, etc.) works for this recipe, but you may also substitute steelhead trout or arctic char. Both are mild in flavor but similar in texture to farm-raised salmon.

Phyllo is a paper-thin wheat dough, popular in Greek and other Mediterranean cuisine. You’ll find it in the freezer section near the pie crusts and puff pastry. The brand I buy comes in 9 x 14” sheets, which is very manageable and large enough to create two salmon packets.

If you don’t have shallots, substitute very finely minced sweet or red onion. Do not confuse scallions for shallots. Scallions are long, skinny green onions. Shallots resemble small oblong Spanish onions, but with a light red color. The two are very different in texture and flavor and should not be considered interchangeable for any recipe.

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TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PHYLLO

Use melted butter on every layer of the phyllo. Keep the new sheets covered with a clean towel to prevent them drying out as you work. Use a pastry mat for brushing the phyllo with butter or clean your counter really well before and after. Transfer unused phyllo to a gallon-sized zip top bag and seal, squeezing out as much air as possible. Store it in the refrigerator but try to use it within a week.

INSTRUCTIONS

Gather up the tools you'll need, including a sharp chef knife (for removing salmon skin), a pastry mat or clean section of counter space, a heavy-duty baking sheet and a pastry brush for spreading butter on the phyllo layers.

1. Follow package instructions for thawing the phyllo. It usually requires overnight in the fridge or a few hours on the counter.
2. Preheat oven to 375° F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.
3. Remove the skin from the salmon if the fishmonger did not do this for you. Beginning at the tail end with the flesh side up, carefully slide the tip of a sharp knife between the flesh and skin, just enough to loosen about 2 inches of skin. Grab the skin with a paper towel. Position the knife at a low angle, and gently tug the skin side to side, holding the knife firmly in place. Continue to pull the skin until it releases from the fillet.
4. Cut the fish into equal portions, approximately 5 ounces each. Sprinkle the fillets with salt, pepper and dried dill leaves. Set aside.
5. Spray a pastry mat or clean section of the counter with olive oil spray. Melt butter in a small bowl. Unroll one sleeve of phyllo so that sheets are lying flat.
6. Carefully spread one sheet of phyllo dough onto the counter, gently pressing down the edges to keep it in place. Remember to cover the remaining phyllo sheets with a clean towel or plastic film to prevent them from drying out while you work.
7. Brush melted butter all over the first phyllo sheet, starting in the center, and cover the full sheet all the way to the edges. The first few sheets may tear a little bit, but this is OK. The layering will help to hide any imperfections. Repeat until you have five buttered layers of phyllo.
8. Using a sharp knife, cut the phyllo stack straight down the middle and arrange the salmon fillets, face side-down on the center of each new rectangle.
9. Fold the short end of the phyllo stack up over the salmon, then fold in the sides and the other end. Brush the overlapped side of the packet with melted butter, then turn it over and brush the other side. Transfer the packet to the cookie sheet and repeat with the other fish packet.
10. Bake at 375° for 25-30 minutes, until phyllo is golden brown. Prepare sauce while fish is baking.
11. Spoon a portion of sauce onto each serving plate. Carefully cut fish packet in half and stack the halves on top of the champagne cream sauce.

SAUCE:

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan, combine champagne and shallots. Cook over medium heat to a light boil, then reduce heat and simmer until liquid is reduced by half. Whisk flour into half & half until smooth. Add to champagne mixture and stir over medium heat until thickened and bubbly. Stir in Dijon mustard, white pepper and salt to taste. Keep sauce warm until ready to serve.