SMOKED · MEDIUM

Hot-Smoked Whole Mackerel on the Kamado

Whole mackerel, half an hour in brine and forty-five minutes of cherry smoke at 120 °C: taut copper skin, juicy flesh and real smoke. Nothing like cold-smoked salmon, and it is eaten the same day.



PREP	COOK	SERVINGS	TEMPERATURE
25 min	45 min	4	120 °C

Ingredients

- **4 ud** whole mackerel, 300-400 g each, gutted and gills removed
- **1500 ml** cold water
- **150 g** coarse sea salt
- **30 g** sugar
- **2 ud** bay leaves
- **1 cda** black peppercorns
- **2 ud** lemons, one sliced and one to serve
- **4 ud** dill sprigs
- **2 ud** garlic cloves, sliced
- **2 cda** extra virgin olive oil
- **1 puñado** cherry wood chips for smoking, about 60 g
- **1 pizca** flaky sea salt, to serve

Method

1 A SHORT BRINE

Dissolve the salt and sugar in the cold water along with the bay and peppercorns. Submerge the gutted mackerel, cover and leave for 30 minutes in the fridge, not a minute more: the flesh is thin and over-salted mackerel is inedible. Lift them out, rinse under the tap and dry them thoroughly inside and out.

2 DRY TO A PELLICLE

Set the mackerel apart on a wire rack and leave them uncovered in the fridge for 45 to 60 minutes, or in front of a fan on low for 30. The skin should feel dry and slightly tacky: that pellicle is what grips the smoke and builds the colour. Put the fish in wet and the smoke slides off, leaving the skin grey.

3 SET UP THE KAMADO

Light the charcoal in a single spot with one firelighter and leave the lid open for five minutes. Close it, fit the Big Green Egg ConvEGGtor legs up and slide a tray under the grate to catch the drips. Open the bottom vent a finger's width and the top one barely a slit. Climb slowly towards 120 °C: if the ceramic overshoots 150 °C, bringing it back down takes half an hour.

4 CHERRY AND BLUE SMOKE

Once the chamber settles near 120 °C, set a Grill Republic cherry chunk half-buried next to the lit spot and close the lid (if chips are all you have, wrap them in foil with four or five holes: loose on the coals they flame instead of smoking). Give it two or three minutes: thick white smoke comes first, then a thin, almost transparent blue thread. That is the moment to put the fish in, never before, because white smoke is what turns it bitter.

5 LAY THE MACKEREL IN

Oil the grate and the skin of the fish. Stuff each mackerel with a slice of lemon, a sliver of garlic and a sprig of dill. Lay them belly down, two fingers apart, heads facing the same way, and close the lid. Do not touch them for the first 20 minutes: the skin has to set before it will release from the bars on its own.

6 SMOKE WITHOUT PEEKING

Hold the chamber between 110 and 125 °C throughout, correcting only with the bottom vent and in tiny increments. The Inkbird IBT-4XS lets you watch grate and fish temperature at once without lifting the lid. Every time you open it you lose the smoke you have built and about ten minutes of stability, so curiosity is expensive here.

7 CHECK THE DONENESS

At 40 minutes, probe the thickest part of the loin next to the backbone: you want 62 to 65 °C. The flesh should look opaque right to the bone and flake under gentle pressure, and the skin should be taut, glossy and dark copper. If it falls short, give it another 5 or 10 minutes; a 350 g mackerel rarely needs more than 50.

8 REST AND FILLET

Lift the mackerel out with two spatulas and rest them 10 minutes on a rack: straight off the grate they fall apart at a touch. With an Arcos Universal fish knife, open them along the spine, lift the fillet away whole and pull the backbone out in one go from the head end. Serve with lemon, flaky salt and bread, or cool them completely for the next day.

Editor's tips

- Drying is not optional: without a tacky pellicle the smoke slides off and the mackerel turns out grey, tasting of ash rather than cherry.
- Light one spot of charcoal only and creep up to 120 °C from below; ceramic stores so much heat that correcting an overshoot costs more than starting again.
- Choose mackerel of matched size, 300 to 400 g. Mix big and small ones and the small ones dry out while you wait for the rest.
- One handful of chips is enough. Adding wood halfway through only adds bitterness, because the fish takes up almost all its smoke in the first twenty minutes.

Gear for this recipe

Big Green Egg Large

mikamado.es/en/kamados/big-green-egg-large

Grill Republic premium cherry wood chips 1.5 kg

A scant handful, about 60 grams, and that is all: mackerel takes up almost all its smoke in the first twenty minutes, so the wood has to give clean smoke from the start. Grill Republic cherry brings the sweet, mild profile that rides alongside oily fish instead of burying it, a long way from oak or mesquite. Scatter it over the coals and wait for the thin blue wisp before the fish goes in.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/grill-republic-cerezo-chunks-1-5kg

Onlyfire GCG-8552 Cooking System (2 grates + rack + 2 deflectors) for Large Kamado

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/onlyfire-gcg8552-sistema-coccion

Inkbird IBT-4XS Bluetooth thermometer

Here every lift of the lid costs you the smoke you have built up and ten minutes of stability, and the window between 62 and 65 °C in the loin is narrow. The Inkbird IBT-4XS leaves one probe at grate height and another sunk next to the backbone, and alerts your phone when the fish is there. With the lid shut you also see the moment the chamber creeps past 125 °C.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/inkbird-ibt-4xs

Arcos Universal Salmon / Fish Slicing Knife 290 mm

Mackerel bones out best warm, straight off the smoke, while the flesh still lifts by itself. The Arcos salmon knife, long and flexible, runs between fillet and backbone without shredding the fish and lifts both loins whole; the same blade then cuts them into clean pieces for the table.

mikamado.es/en/accesorios/arcos-universal-salmonero-290

Full recipe at: mikamado.es/en/recetas/caballa-ahumada-caliente-kamado

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