

Chef's Corner: Shrimp Imperial-Stuffed Spanish Mackerel and Bluefish Fillets

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When the Bite Heats up this Spring, try this Variation of the Classic Dish that put our Family Restaurant on the Map in 1976!

One of my favorite ways to enjoy a nice thick fillet is broiled with an Imperial Stuffing made from one or more of the following: Fresh-picked Blue Crab; Fresh NC Shrimp; or Fresh-shucked Oysters, Clams, & Scallops.

Pictured below is a meal I concocted at our Salvo cottage: Fresh Garden-ripe Tomato Salad, Hand-cut Fried Potatoes; and an absolutely amazing 14-ounce Shrimp-Stuffed Spanish Mackerel Fillet, which is this month's featured dish!



Shrimp-Stuffed Spanish Mackerel with all the trimmings – this is by far my favorite recipe for broiling fresh fish!

With the price of fresh, quality crabmeat skyrocketing, this recipe focuses on utilizing something most OBX surf anglers have left in their cooler after a day or two of fishing – fresh “bait” shrimp!

I like to use FRESH bait when I fish – as in fresh enough for me to eat! Bait shrimp is food shrimp portioned-out for anglers, but it is no different than the “good stuff” you find in the local seafood shop or roadside stand.

On this particular angling excursion, I left the fresh bait on ice in the cooler and opted for my “metal rod” and favorite Stingsilver to cast – and catch – a nice mess of Spanish Mackerel and Bluefish.

A successful catch of both meant that my “bait shrimp” was now on the menu!



Classic May Catch throwing metal in the OBX Surf!



Fresh, well-iced Spanish & Bluefish Fillets!



Shrimp-stuffed Bluefish Rocks!

Below are the ingredients and basic process for preparing the Fish for the broiler and mixing the Imperial stuffing. The two Bluefish yielded four really nice “*Stuffable*” fillets that I broiled with the leftover Shrimp Imperial from this recipe.

I like to cook extra like that because it heats up so well for a quick lunch or breakfast, and it’s also excellent eaten cold right out of the fridge for a late-night snack. It really is that good, and I hope you get a chance to try it this summer!

Ingredients:

While the ingredients can vary, and I often tweak the recipe with whatever ingredients I have on hand, this basic recipe is very simple and easy to replicate time and again with great results.

Preparing the Fish:

1-2 pounds fresh Bluefish or Spanish Mackerel fillets (8-10 oz each, but smaller will work – just get more of them!)

¼ cup melted butter or olive oil to baste fillets

Seasoning of choice for the flesh of the fish (i.e. salt, pepper, oregano, garlic, and paprika – or simply use Old Bay, Lemon Pepper, or Cajun Shake)

½ Lemon (for squeezing over fish and deglazing the pan)

Dash of Dry Sherry (optional)

NOTE: This recipe works fine with virtually any FRESH fillets, including Kingfish, Flounder, Mahi, and Sea Trout.

Shrimp Imperial:

¾-pound fresh NC shrimp, cooked (up to a pound works!)

2 eggs

½-cup extra heavy mayonnaise (more if regular mayo)

1 tablespoon Worcestershire Sauce

2 teaspoons Tabasco (to taste, really – I like a kick)

1 tablespoon parsley flakes (can use fresh parsley, also)

1 tablespoon plain breadcrumbs

1 tablespoon finely diced onion (optional)

2 tablespoons of finely shredded cheddar (sharp or mild) – more if you like it cheesy!

1 teaspoon Old Bay Seasoning or Cajun Shake



Shrimp-stuffed Bluefish & Kingfish I prepared for VBAC anglers during the 2018 Ocracoke Surf Tournament!



A tasty batch of Shrimp Imperial.



Spanish Fillets Ready to Stuff!



Beautiful 14-inch Spanish Fillet!



Buttered-up & Ready to Broil...



Basted, Seasoned, & ready to Bake!



Shrimp-stuffed Bluefish Rocks!!

Directions:

Shrimp Imperial:

Gently steam the shrimp and immediately shock in ice to shill. Once chilled, peel and drain the shrimp.

Once shrimp are cold, pat dry on paper towel and chop the shrimp and add to a large mixing bowl.

Combine shrimp, eggs, and all other ingredients in bowl and mix by hand until well-combined.

The mixture should have a creamy texture with no visible liquid or juices.

Return to the fridge and let the Shrimp Imperial “set.”

Stuffing the Fillets:

Make two slits longitudinally into the middle of the fillet on either side of the centerline.

Be careful not to cut straight down and through – the cut should create a nice long pouch from top to bottom in which the stuffing is placed.

Baste each stuffed fillet with oil and broil on the high rack on high until the Imperial begins to brown. Remove from the broiler, baste each fillet, and season the fish with your choice of seasonings. Lightly dust the entire fillet with paprika and return to the oven on a lower rack and bake (or leave broiler on) until the imperial is just firm to the touch.

When done, remove from oven, kill the sizzle with a dash of dry sherry, and squeeze fresh lemon juice around the fish to deglaze the pan and create a wonderful sauce. I like using a little dry sherry as I deglaze the pan, but it is entirely optional.

Drizzle the lemon-butter sauce from the pan over the fillets and serve!



Mixed Bag: Flounder, Bluefish, & Kingfish Fillets!



Testimonial to the versatility of this great recipe!



Trying to drool while the Shrimp-stuffed fillets Brown.



Shrimp-Stuffed Flounder, Bluefish, & Kingfish Fillets!

As this last sequence of photos portrays, this recipe is extremely versatile and can be applied to virtually and fresh catch. Is it any wonder why visitors to Chez Germanos in OBX request this dish every year!

ENJOY!

Contributed by: VBAC Member John Germanos, aka "The Instinctive Chef"