

# A Really Nice Fish with Cucumber and Crunchy Garlic Salad

Serves 4

A Really Nice Fish (a 2-ish pound filet of salmon, cod, halibut, arctic char, steelhead trout) got its name because I make it so often, for basically any occasion, but feels especially good to say out loud on Sunday, cooking for one or four people. This fish becomes “really nice” by basically cooking it very low and slow in lots of olive oil, possibly with sliced lemon or assorted citrus, maybe chili flake, maybe not. Silky and tender, the perfection here is in the texture of a just-cooked fatty piece of fish, not any sort of bell/whistle flavor combination.

While this fish is perfect in its boringness, it does absolutely cry out for a punchy, assertively flavored, dramatically textured salad. Chief among them, this one made with cucumber. PLEASE don't freak out over the amount of olive oil, you're not drinking it, you're just cooking inside of it (warm bath!). And PLEASE reuse the olive oil for more cooking. For frying eggs, for roasting a chicken (sounds wrong but it's not), for coating broccoli before it goes into the oven. It doesn't taste fishy, it is reusable, it's not a big deal, just do it, thank you.

## Ingredients

### For the fish:

**1 2-pound filet arctic char, salmon, steelhead trout, cod, haddock, or halibut, skin-on or off**

**Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

**Crushed red pepper flakes, optional**

**1 lemon, half thinly sliced, seeds removed; half reserved for serving**

**1 to 1 ½ cups olive oil**

### For the cucumber salad:

**6 Persian cucumbers, or 2 hothouse cucumbers**

**½ cup olive oil**

**6 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped**

**Crushed red pepper flakes**

**½ teaspoon ground turmeric**

**1 teaspoon flaky sea salt, plus more for seasoning**

**2 scallions or 1 shallot, thinly sliced**

**3 tablespoons distilled white vinegar, white wine vinegar, or rice wine vinegar, plus more to taste**

**½ cup fresh mixed herbs, such as dill, mint, cilantro and parsley, coarsely chopped**

## Instructions

### 1 Make the fish:

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Place the fish in a baking dish approximately the same size as the fish (standard 1 ½-2 quart baking dish is fine— sheet pan also works in a pinch, you'll just use less olive oil). Season the top of the fish with salt, pepper, and a few pinches of crushed red pepper flakes if you're using. Arrange the sliced lemon over the fish in a dreamy scattered pattern or perfect Virgo shingles. Pour the olive oil until it reaches about halfway up the thickest part of the fish (start with 1 cup, add more as needed— remember, you can reuse this oil! Don't be shy) and season again with salt and pepper.

### 2 Place the fish in the oven and slowly roast until the fish goes from dark pink and translucent to a lighter more peachy pink, and is just cooked through in the center, 12-15 minutes (could be longer for especially thick filets, slightly shorter for thinner pieces. Your best way to tell the doneness of the fish is by change of color and texture— rare/raw fish will be deeper in color and soft/squishy to the touch, well done fish will be light/paler pink and firm/bouncy to the touch). Remove from oven and set aside while you make your sides (this fish never gets hot and that's the point— it's great at room temperature, so don't worry about it sitting for a bit).

### 3 Make the cucumber salad:

Cut the cucumbers into 1-inch chunks, then gently smash them using the side of your knife until they split. Transfer to a medium bowl and season with salt, then set aside while you prepare the rest of the salad. You can also place the cucumbers in a large resealable plastic bag and season with salt. Using a heavy skillet, rolling pin, or anything heavy, smash the cucumbers until they split and explode a bit, pick your pleasure! Let them sit a few minutes to release some of that water and season deeply.

### 4 Heat the oil in a medium pot over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, swirling the pot occasionally, until the garlic is sizzling loudly and looks (and smells) delightfully toasted, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat, then add a generous pinch of pepper flakes, turmeric, and season with salt. Swirl the pot to toast and bloom the spices. Set aside.

### 5 Drain the cucumbers, discarding any liquid. Combine the cucumbers, most of the scallions, and vinegar in a large serving bowl. Season with salt, pepper, and more vinegar if needed. Add most of the dill and toss to combine. Drizzle with the toasted garlic oil, letting it run into the tiny scraggly bits, then finish with more scallion and dill.

### 6 Break up the fish with a large spoon and transfer to a serving plate. Spoon some of the cooking oil over top, and finish with flaky salt, cracked pepper, crushed red pepper flakes, and the juice of the other half of the lemon.

**DO AHEAD:** Fish can be made an hour or so ahead, but if storing for longer you'll want to refrigerate it. I haven't found a good way to reheat fish, to which I say: Eat it cold, it's perfect.

Cucumbers can be smashed a few hours ahead, draining and seasoning before serving. Crunchy garlic and turmeric oil can be made 2 days ahead, covered, and refrigerated; bring to room temperature before using.