

Sauteed True North Salmon with Moroccan Spices, Lentils, and Harissa Tomato Sauce



By: Chef Rick Moonen

Earthy and spicy, this is an ideal dish for a cool night, I like the texture of the lentils and the balance of legumes and heat.

Serves 4

4 (7-ounce) pieces True North Salmon Fillet, Skin on
1 Box Kosher Salt
Moroccan Spice Mix (recipe to follow)
1 Quart of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 Pound of Unsalted butter
Harissa Tomato Sauce (recipe to follow)
Basic Lentils (recipe to follow)
Cilantro Garnish (one bunch)

Heat two saute pans over high heat. Meanwhile, season the salmon on both sides with salt and the spice mix. You want a light but noticeable coating of the spice.

Add a slick of oil to each pan. Set in the fillets, skin side down, and reduce the heat to medium-high. Press down on the fish with your spatula, listening for the sizzle that tells you you're making a good crust. Add 1 tablespoon butter to each pan, breaking it into smaller pieces so it will melt quickly. Once the butter melts, tilt the pan and baste the fish. Cook for about 4 minutes on the first side. You'll see the fish cooking from the bottom up. When it is almost cooked through, turn it over to sear the flesh side for 1 minute then turn off the heat. Let the fish sit for 30 seconds or so. Transfer to paper towels.

To serve, spoon a bed of the tomato sauce onto the center of the warm plate and a small mound of lentils into the center of the sauce. Set the fish on top and garnish with some fresh cilantro.

Moroccan Spice Mix

Makes about 6 tablespoons
4 tablespoons coriander seeds
4 tablespoons fennel seeds
2 tablespoon cumin seeds
2 tablespoon cardamom pods
20 whole cloves

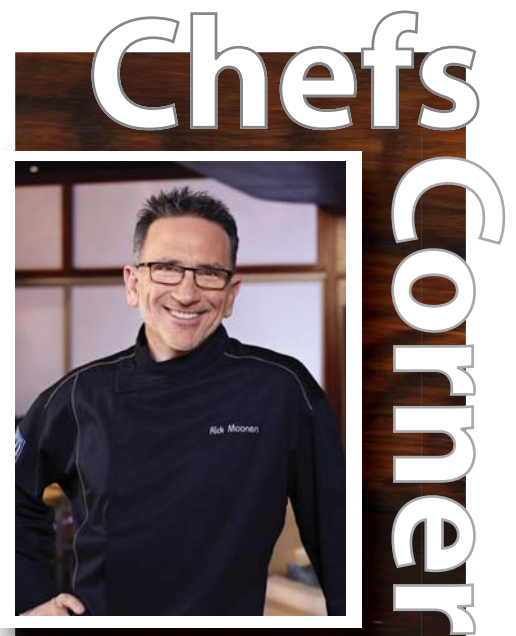
Toast the spices in a small heavy skillet over medium heat until they are fragrant and lightly colored, about 7 minutes. Scrape them out into a bowl and let cool completely. You're really giving the cloves a chance to cool – process them while they're hot, and they will release oils that you'll never get out of your grinder.

Put the spices in a spice grinder and process into a fine powder. Transfer to a small jar and keep, out of the light, for up to 6 months.

Harissa Tomato Sauce

No long simmering for this spicy sauce; you need cook it only long enough to wake up the spice
Makes about 2 cups
3 tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil
½ cup minced shallots (12 large shallots)
2 tablespoons Harissa (one can plus one jar of sriracha hot sauce)
1 tablespoon Moroccan Spice
2 teaspoons red wine vinegar (small bottle)
2 cups chopped tomatoes (Pomi brand preferred; see note)
Kosher salt

Heat a stainless steel saucepan over medium-high heat. When the pan's hot, add the oil and shallots and saute for 1 minute. Add the garlic and saute for another minute. Add the Harissa and Moroccan spice and saute for 1 to 2 more



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minutes, stirring constantly, until the shallots are translucent.

Add the vinegar and stir. It will bubble up and evaporate almost immediately. Stir in the tomatoes and season with salt. Bring to a simmer, reduce the heat to medium, and simmer for 5 minutes. And that's the sauce.

You can make this a day in advance; reheat it when you serve.

Note: Thick, flavorful Pomi tomatoes are important in this sauce because it cooks so quickly. If you can't find them in your local grocery, you can substitute canned chopped tomatoes. Start with 3 cups and let the tomatoes drain in a strainer set over a bowl to remove the excess liquid, then measure out 2 cups.

Basic Lentils

Lentils go well with fish – salmon in particular. And you really don't need to do much to prepare them. Keep a batch of these on hand to reheat and serve when you need them.

Serves 4 to 6

1 pound (2 cups) green or brown lentils
Coarse salt
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tablespoon water

Put the lentils in a saucepan and cover with cold water by at least 2 inches. Season with salt and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Reduce the heat and simmer until the lentils are just tender, about 20 minutes. (If your lentils are very old, they will take much longer to cook, sometimes as long as 1 hour. Add boiling water to the pan if you need to, to keep the lentils covered.) Drain the lentils and spread them out on a baking sheet so they cool evenly.

To serve, melt the butter with the water in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the lentils and cook, stirring occasionally, until hot.