

COPPER RIVER SALMON

The mighty Copper River is one of the longest and most rugged rivers in Alaska. Twisting and cutting deeply through the Wrangell and Chugach mountains, its 300 mile stretch of pristine glacier-fed waters is riddled by hundreds of rapids.

Every May, around the 15th, the first salmon of the season return to the rivers and streams of Alaska with the Copper River being one of the first. King, Sockeye, and Silver salmon embark on long journeys up the Copper River to spawn and lay their eggs. As salmon begin their last journey up this home stretch and prepare to mate, their feeding habits diminish. Because the Copper River salmon's journey is so long, they must store extra fat and oils in order to survive the long trip. This high fat and oil content is why Copper River salmon are recognized as some of the world's best eating salmon.

Copper River salmon are bright silvery salmon with a bright red flesh, a firm texture, and a rich flavor that makes them a very delicious dining experience whose popularity is rapidly growing.

Hundreds of fishermen try their luck, flooding the local Alaskan fishing town of Cordova in a "salmon rush" frenzy. The 500 some gill-netters fish the 35-mile wide Copper River Delta (mouth) where depth and sandbars change yearly. The rushing waters of the Copper River empty steeply from the mountains above while breakers pound in from the ocean. Unpredictable weather and tides makes fishing the "Flats" of the Copper River a bit dangerous at times. But the catch is well worth it.

For the fisherman, catching 100 sockeye in a set is okay, but 400 is outstanding. There are tales of catches bearing as much as 700 fish! One of the reasons Copper River salmon are so prized is that the salmon are handled very carefully when caught, being bled and dressed immediately, put on ice and shipped out fresh.

The first fish are tendered and rushed back to Cordova where "salmon-thirty-salmons", as locals call them, quickly fly directly to Seattle and off-load the fish to distribute them into markets and restaurants.

Additionally, each May, the Pacific Northwest restaurants and markets celebrate the arrival of the first fish. There are festivals, parades and community activities all centered around the local competition of whose going to have the first available Copper River salmon. As the newspapers fill with ads of fish for sale, "low flying fish" can be seen commonly at Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle as locals buy whole salmon and fillets for memorable outdoor barbecues and picnics. Exquisite dining is offered by many restaurants featuring gourmet dishes of salmon delicacies.

And when it comes to nutritional benefits, it is definitely a smart choice for a healthy diet. The high oil content of Copper River salmon contains Omega-3 fatty acids which help

reduce heart disease and lower cholesterol. Studies have also found that fish oil can help combat ailments as psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, breast cancer, and migraines. Furthermore, salmon is an excellent source of protein and essential amino acids.

Copper River Salmon Nutrition

Serving Size:3 oz.	King	Sockeye	Silver
Calories	200	180	160
Protein	21 gr.	23 gr.	23 gr.
Fat	11.5 gr.	9 gr.	7 gr.
Carbohydrate	0 gr.	0 gr.	0 gr.
Sodium	50 mg	50 mg	50 mg
Potassium	360 mg	410 mg	470 mg
Cholesterol	70 mg	60 mg	40 mg

Basics

- Keep salmon refrigerated until ready to cook.
- Leave skin on during cooking; it helps to hold fish together while turning or moving it. The skin comes off easily after cooking.
- Keep salmon skin intact to prevent curling.
- Cook salmon just until meat begins to change color and becomes flaky.
- Salmon will continue to cook after being removed from heat source, so be careful not to overcook.

Food Safety Tips

- Avoid cross-contamination by thoroughly washing cutting boards and counter with hot soapy water after handling raw salmon.
- Wash hands thoroughly with hot water and soap before and after handling raw salmon.
- Discard any marinade used for marinating salmon before grilling or broiling.
- Use a clean plate to bring cooked salmon to the table, not the plate used to carry raw salmon to the grill.
- Promptly refrigerate any leftover cooked salmon; use within two days.

To Broil

Heat broiler; position oven rack so salmon will be 5-6 inches from heat. Lightly oil broiler pan. Start fillets skin side up. Cook until done, turning once.

The following guidelines may help you estimate times.

Cut	Size	Temperature	Time
Whole	1-1.5 lbs.	Medium	7-9 minutes per .5 lb.
Fillets, Steaks	.5-1 inch	Medium	4-6 minutes per .5 inch of thickness

To Grill

Direct Heat Grilling

Prepare medium-hot fire in grill (or turn grill to medium-high). Bank fire against one side of grill and position salmon over grill pan, not directly over fire. Cover and grill until done, turning steaks once, about 4-6 minutes per .5-inch thickness of fillets or steaks. A whole salmon will require about 7-9 minutes per .5 pound.

Indirect Heat Grilling

Prepare medium-hot fire in grill (or turn grill to medium-high). Bank fire against one side of grill and position salmon over drip pan, not directly over fire. Start fillets skin side up. Cover and grill until done, turning steaks once, about 4-6 minutes per .5-inch thickness of fillets or steaks. A whole salmon will require about 7-9 minutes per .5 pound.

Use the following cooking times as a guideline.

Cut	Size	Coal Temperature	Grilling Time
Whole	.5-1.5 lbs.	Medium	20-25 minutes per .5 lb.
Fillet, Steak	.5-1 inch	Medium	4-6 minutes per .5 inch of thickness

To Sauté

Heat a little oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add salmon (start fillets skin side up) and cook until done, turning once.

To Pan-Broil

Heat heavy skillet or grill pan over medium-high heat. Add salmon (start fillets skin side up) and cook until done, turning once.

To Roast

Heat oven to 450° F. Brush shallow baking pan with a little oil. Arrange salmon in single

layer, skin side down, place in oven and roast until done. There is no need to turn salmon when roasting.

Timing:

- **Fresh or Thawed Salmon**
Bake uncovered in a preheated 450°F oven for 4-6 minutes for each .5 inch of thickness.
- **Whole, Dressed Salmon**
Bake uncovered in a preheated 450°F oven for 10 minutes for each inch of thickness at the thickest part of the salmon.

To Poach

Fill large shallow skillet half full of water; bring to a boil (add thinly sliced lemon or onion, peppercorns or fresh herbs to the poaching water if desired). Add salmon, reduce heat, simmer very gently just until done. Lift out to drain. Serve warm or chilled.

Timing:

- **Fresh or Thawed Salmon**
For each .5 inch of thickness, simmer uncovered for 4-6 minutes.
- **Frozen Salmon**
For each .5 inch of thickness, simmer uncovered for 6-9 minutes.
- **Whole, Dressed Salmon**
Leave the head and tail intact to allow the salmon to retain its natural juices. For each .5 lb. of fish, simmer covered for 6-9 minutes.

To Microwave

Arrange one or two steaks or fillets on microwaveable plate or baking dish, tucking ends of pieces under so they won't overcook. Cover with waxed paper or lid. Cook on high (100%) power 3-5 minutes. Let stand 2 minutes; then test for doneness.

When Is It Done?

Appearance is the best gauge of doneness in salmon: When flesh is opaque. Insert the tip of a sharp knife near the bone of a salmon steak or at the thickest part of a fillet and pull away slightly. Well-done salmon will be completely opaque and flake easily. Medium-done salmon will still have some pink at the center. Salmon continues to cook after removing from heat, so figure on a minute or two of standing time to complete cooking.

Ten-Minutes-Per-Inch Rule for Grilling, Broiling or Poaching. Time can also be used as a rule-of-thumb guide for cooking time. Measure the piece of salmon at its thickest part and cook 10 minutes for each inch of thickness.