

Loup en Crôte

Sea Bass in Puff Pastry



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Loup en Croûte (Sea Bass in Puff Pastry) Recipe.

The Loup en croûte is a famous French dish that was introduced in the Seventies from the oldest 3 Michelin starred restaurant; Paul Bocuse at L'Auberge Du Pont de Collonges near Lyon, France. A dish consisting of a whole cleaned and skinned sea bass (bar) stuffed with a vegetable and dairy based filling or other scallops mousse and then wrapped in puff pastry and baked. The crusted fish is then brought to the client's table. It is meticulously cut and boned and paired with a sauce aux herbes (herbed butter sauce) – an elegant and impressive French classic which remains in the menu today!

To adapt this dish to home cooks though, the fish is rather turned into filets, boned and reconstituted before being wrapped in pastry.

Whatever method is preferred, the stuffing is there to create moisture that won't escape during baking thanks to the puff pastry so the flesh of the fish won't dry out.

Serves 3 to 4.

1.5 lb. (700g) sea bass (loup de mer / bar / branzino), cleaned, scaled, filets removed and skinned. Save head and tail.

1lb. (450g) puff pastry. (Store-bought or best: home made inverted puff pastry. (Watch inverted puff pastry video).

Method

If using store-bought puff pastry, thaw it in the refrigerator overnight. In a floured work surface roll out pastry into two 0.15" (4mm) thick and 16"x7" (40x18cm) sheets. Cut out a few ovals for the extra fins and a couple of strips for the neck. Chill. Save scraps for later use.

Spinach Stuffing

1lb. (450g) fresh spinach, stems removed, washed and spin-dried

2 ea. garlic cloves, crushed and skin on

1/2 Tbsp (7.5ml) olive oil or use 50% olive oil 50% butter

1/2 cup (125g) cottage cheese or fromage blanc

1/2 Tbsp (5g) lemon confit or more, minced (optional / watch lemon confit video)

1 small egg

Salt and pepper to taste.

Method

Remove stems and wash spinach thoroughly and spin-dry. In a hot pot or dutch oven, add olive oil and stir in the crushed garlic. Throw in spinach and cook stirring swiftly for a minute or so on high heat. Season lightly with salt and pepper and cover and cook for another 2 minutes; on low heat. Transfer cooked spinach over a few layers of paper towels to drain. Let cool completely. Discard garlic. Using more paper towels, squeeze out the remaining juice left in spinach and chop. Mix together spinach, cottage cheese, egg and lemon confit. Add more salt and pepper if needed. Keep the spinach mixture refrigerated. If the mixture happens to be too watery, drain and add some of bread crumbs. www.brunoskitchen.net



Loup en Croûte Assembly

Puff pastry sheets and extra cuts, chilled

Fish filets boned and skinned, fish head and tail, chilled

Extra virgin olive oil, fleur de sel and ground black pepper to season the filets

Spinach stuffing, chilled.

Egg wash: 1 whole egg, beaten or blended with a pinch of salt.

Fresh dill for garnishing.



Lay out the first pastry sheet onto a baking tray lined with a silicone mat or parchment. Place the first filet in the center (skin side down or where the skin was). Season with olive oil, fleur de sel and black ground pepper. Rebuild the fish adding its head back and tail. Add stuffing to cover the filet and the head cavity. Cover with the second filet and season. Egg wash all around the side of the stuffed fish along with the tail and head. Top with the second pastry sheet and seal well; removing air pockets as you go. Since puff pastry does not like heat, try to keep everything cool. With a paring knife and a pizza cutter, carefully remove excess dough following the shape of the reconstituted fish leaving extra dough though on both sides for the fins. Egg wash the whole fish. Carve the tail and fins using the back of a paring knife. Using a large plain pastry tip, design half moon marks on the fish body to resemble the scales. Add a strip of dough around the neck and make extra fins using the ovale dough cuts to thicken the tail. Add a dorsal fin as well.

Note: When finishing up the fish in pastry, have a picture of the fish you want to duplicate – It helps!. Place the dish in the refrigerator for about an hour to rest before baking.

Baking

In a preheated conventional oven, bake the loup en croûte at 400°F (200°C) for about 40 min. It should take 30 to 35 minutes in a convection oven.

Serve hot with the warm sauce aux herbes. This dish can also be served chilled accompanied with some mustard, pickles, veggoes, salad...

Bon appétit!

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Sauce aux Herbes / Herbed Butter Sauce

2 Tbsp (50g) shallots, minced

1/3 cup (80ml) red vinegar

1/3 cup (80ml) white wine such as chardonnay

1/2 Tbsp (7.5ml) water

2 sticks (226g) European style unsalted butter (like the pure Irish butter Kerrygold), butter must be very soft but not melted

2 Tbsp (5g) tarragon and Italian parsley or cilantro, roughly chopped

1 ea. bay leaf

1 ea. fresh sprig thyme

1/2 Tbsp (5g) lemon confit, minced (optional)

Salt and pepper to taste.

Method

In a small skillet or saucepan, reduce vinegar, wine, shallots, bay leaf and thyme to dry. Add water and stir in the softened butter along with the fresh herbs and lemon confit. Bring to a boil and season to taste. Discard bay leaf and thyme. Serve warm the same day.

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