

# Sour Mackerel – Asem Ikan

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This sour fish recipe sounds a bit crazy and looks a bit messy, but it is incredibly tasty! This dish is pretty acidic because of vinegar and tamarind. The mackerel is creamy in flavor which goes well with the sourness of the sauce.



## Mackerel

I love mackerel. It is such a lovely, fatty fish, that is great for your health. But the fish has a lot of bones. That makes it hard to eat. The recipe says that it is necessary to chop it into pieces. I leave my fish whole because it is easier to eat (easier to take the bones out) when it is done.

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Sour Fish # 217 translated from Beb Vuyk's Groot Indonesisch Kookboek, page 201.

## Ingredients

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- 1 kg mackerel or tub gurnard
- 5 tablespoons of oil
- 2 tablespoons of vinegar

## Herbs

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- 3 tablespoons of chopped onions
- 2 chopped up cloves of garlic
- 2 teaspoons sambal ulek
- 4 roasted kemiries (candle nuts)
- 2 teaspoons of ginger powder
- 1 teaspoon of kunjit (turmeric)
- 2 tablespoons of asem (tamarind) water, made with a piece of asem the size of a walnut
- 1 salam leave (Asian bay leaf)



- salt

1. Clean the fish, cut her into slices and rub her with a paste of asem and salt.
  2. Rub onions, garlic, sambal, kemiries, ginger powder and kunjit into a paste.
  3. Sauté this in the oil, add the vinegar and cook the fish until tender.
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Interesting to see that not so many herbs go into the herb paste (bumbu) but the flavors of this dish are bold and spicy delicious. The two tablespoons of vinegar (not in the picture) and the asem gives this dish its typical flavor.

**Asem** is tamarind. I buy asem in a jar, because it is already filtered. I use a full teaspoon for this recipe.

My **sambal ulek** is finished, so I use a 1 chili for my bumbu (spice mix).

**Kemiries** are candle nuts which are used a lot in the Indonesian kitchen. Kemiries make the herb paste (bumbu) nice and smooth.

I use raw nuts. They have to roast before using otherwise they are slightly poisonous. You can simply buy kemirie nuts in a jar. So much easier to use. One teaspoon is the same amount as two nuts.

The recipe says 'ginger powder', but I still have a piece of fresh **ginger** left. That works too is this bumbu. I use about 2-3 centimeters.

**Salam** is Asian bay leaf available at an Asian food store.



Because the fish has to stew in the herbs, I finely grind the bumbu with my food processor. I add coarsely chopped onions, garlic, chilli, kemiries, ginger powder and kunjit (turmeric) in the bowl of my hand blender and make a fine paste in seconds.

Ofcourse you can rub the herb paste in a mortar. That will blend the flavors even better. But with my blender I can make an even smoother sauce; great to pour over the fish before serving.





I love the yellow color because of the turmeric (kunjit).

I sauté the bumbu in two tablespoons of oil. This makes all the flavors nice and rich.

## Marinate

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In the meantime, I marinate my mackerels in the asem (tamarind) with some salt. I mix a big teaspoon of asem with **half a teaspoon of salt** and I rub the fish with it. The fish are pretty salty themselves so be careful with salt. You can always add more salt at the end. Too salty is bad, for flavor and health, so I'm always careful.

Now my mackerels can go into the pan. The bumbu is stir-fried in the oil, so I just place the fish on top. I also pour in the **two tablespoons of vinegar**.



Now I cover the pan (with silver foil because I do not have a large lid) and let it simmer for a total of **10 minutes**. Then I turn them very carefully and give them another 5 minutes.

I carefully place my fish on a plate. I pour the rest of the sauce that has formed in the pan over it and I garnish my dish with some (Thai) basil. I love the color contrast and basil is great with fish.

This sour mackerel dish is deliciously tender. The fish makes the sauce creamy because of its fat and the acidity makes it light and fresh. We eat our sour mackerel with white rice and a tender sajur lodeh.



