

CRISPY-SKIN SALMON WITH PLANTAINS AND AFRICAN PEPPER SAUCE

Serves 4

Salmon gets the crispy-skin treatment, the crackling texture a fine foil to the fish's rich, tender flesh. Plantains contribute their complex sweetness, mushrooms deliver umami, and just-wilted spinach provides silky greenery. A tangy, tongue-tingling sauce, hailing from West Africa, ties it all together.

For the Vegetables

3½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 ripe plantains (see page 17), peeled and cut into ½-inch-thick slices
1½ teaspoons kosher salt

1 pound mixed mushrooms, such as button, oyster, and shiitake, stemmed and cut into bite-size pieces
5 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 large bunch spinach, stems trimmed

For the Salmon

Four 5-ounce skin-on center-cut salmon fillets
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
1 tablespoon avocado oil
¾ cup African Pepper Sauce (page 308)

MAKE THE VEGETABLES

In a large, heavy skillet, heat 1½ tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat until shimmery. Cook the plantains in a single layer, flipping halfway through, until golden brown and slightly crispy on both sides and creamy in the middle, about 2 minutes per side. Sprinkle on ½ teaspoon of the salt and give them a stir. Transfer the plantains to a serving platter.

Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium-high heat until shimmery. Add the mushrooms and cook, tossing every few minutes, until golden brown, 8 to 10 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium, add the garlic and the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt, and stir well. Cook until the garlic is golden at the edges, about 2 minutes more. Finally, crank the heat up to high, add the spinach, cook until it's just wilted and still bright green, about 1 minute.

Transfer the mixture to the platter with the plantains, give it a toss, and keep it in a warm place while you cook the salmon.

COOK THE SALMON AND SERVE

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Pat the salmon dry with paper towels, then lay the fillets, skin-side down, on fresh paper towels to dry them really well as you heat the skillet.

Heat a large, heavy nonstick or well-seasoned skillet (wide enough to hold the fillets without crowding) over medium-high heat for a minute or so, until it gets nice and hot. Just before you cook the fillets, remove them from the paper towels and season on both sides with the salt.

Once the pan is hot, add the avocado oil and swirl the pan, then add the fillets, skin-side down. Reduce the heat to medium and use a spatula to gently press each fillet for a few seconds so it lays flat in the pan (fillets like to curl up). Cook until the skin is completely crispy and golden brown, about 5 minutes. The salmon should release easily from the pan; if it doesn't, keep cooking until it does.

Transfer the skillet to the oven and cook, skin-side still down, until most of the visible flesh goes from pink to light orange with a patch of slightly translucent pink in the middle, 4 to 6 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fillets.

Serve the salmon with the vegetables and the pepper sauce.