

Bob's Za'atar Crusted Halibut over Vegetables and Couscous

Although I have called out halibut for this recipe any of the firm white fish such as coley, pollock, cod, haddock, hake, sea bass will work well. Others such as tilapia, swai, catfish flounder, and the like would also work but you must be much more careful that they are not overcooked as they are too tender and can easily fall apart after cooking. Not what I would call white fish but you could also use mahi mahi, greyfish (shark) or even any of the tunas. Just adjust the cooking times for the thickness of the fish, and remember underdone is BETTER than overcooked when it comes to fish!

What is Za'atar? It is a family of related Middle Eastern herbs that contains among other things sesame seeds and dried ground sumac. The name *za'atar* alone most properly applies to *Origanum syriacum*, considered by biblical scholars to be the hyssop (Hebrew: זֵרוּחַ [e'zov]) of the Hebrew Bible. Much like curry powder (not by taste) za'atar has hundreds of actual recipes. See my version of the spice in another document. You will need some for this recipe. If you wish to use the optional tahini, you may check that out too.

Ingredients

- 4 Servings skinless Halibut about 1" thick and 2"-3" wide per serving
- 1 Carrot, julienned
- 1 Yellow Onion, slivered
- 1 Fennel Bulb, slivered (save green tops for veg dip or use here) Note: if you are also making use of some green onions for a dip, add the onion tops to the vegetables here too. (See note about menu below)
- 1 Lemon cut in wedges to serve on each plate
- 1 Cup Couscous
- 1 Tablespoon butter and 1 cup of water for the couscous
- Za'atar
- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Salt and Pepper
- Tahini (optional)

Process

Julienne and sliver the vegetables. Add olive oil to a sauté pan (cast iron works well) and sauté all the vegetables until just soft but not browned and add salt and pepper to taste. When complete spread all the vegetables evenly in the bottom of a roasting pan to make a bed for the fish. Pat the fish filets dry and place them spaced over the vegetables in the roasting pan. Using a brush, carefully top each filet with a generous amount of olive oil. Let them stand for a few minutes and then brush another coat of olive oil on each filet. Now add a good layer of za'atar consistently over the top of each fish serving (not the vegetables). Cover the roasting pan until ready to cook.

In the mean time, preheat the oven to 350°. Add 1 cup of water, the butter and some salt to a small pan and bring it to a boil then turn to simmer covered ready for the couscous. Because the fish and couscous take a very short time to cook, you won't want to begin cooking until about 10 minutes before serving.

When you are ready to cook, turn the oven to broil and place the roasting pan with the fish and vegetables on a center level rack of the oven. You will broil the fish for 6 to 8 maybe 10 minutes depending on your oven and broiler. The tops will not get browned but will look it because of the za'atar. At the same time you start the fish, turn off the simmering water for the couscous and add the one cup to the seasoned water, cover and let stand.

When the fish is done (it can still be slightly rare in the center) remove it from the oven and serve immediately. To serve, fluff the couscous then place a good base (2 or 3 spoons full) on the plate (warmed if you can) then using a spatula scoop up a serving of fish with the vegetables underneath and place it on top of the couscous. If you are using the optional tahini, drizzle a small amount on the top of the filet; add a wedge of lemon and what ever else you are serving to the plate then continue the same way for the next plate.

This will serve 4 people, but you may obviously change the quantities for more or less depending upon the number of guests you have.

I used this as the main entree for a Mediterranean meal I prepared. You can check out the other recipes and full menu here:

<http://www.snydersmart.com/courthouseladies/index.html#med>

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