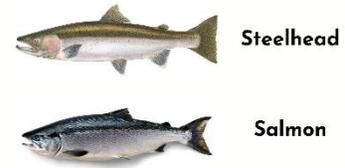


## STEELHEAD TROUT IN A VIETNAMESE-STYLE MARINADE

My wife, Ami, came upon this recipe a few years ago and I have yet to find the upper limit on how many times per week I can eat it. Steelhead trout is related to salmon though it is a unique sub-species with a more buttery texture and milder flavor. It is the texture that really attracts me as it maintains a silkiness and the flesh does not dry out as easily as salmon though the cooking method really drives the result. Both fish live in fresh and salty waters though steelhead spends more of its time in fresh water and can handle warmer waters. Fortunately, steelhead is a little less expensive than most salmon and we find it almost year-round in our markets in northern California.



This recipe has two important features that make the dish so delicious. The first is the marinade. Many people balk at fish sauce as it is pungent and, well, smells a little fishy. You really want to balk? Look up how fish sauce is made. In a judicious dose, however, fish sauce is delicious and an umami bomb. That fifth taste sensation that is somewhat indescribable but adds the impression of richness and depth of flavor. Mushrooms have it as do cooked tomatoes, cheese, meat, soy sauce, and...fish sauce. If the aroma bothers you, open a window in the kitchen to let the smell dissipate. Despite the aroma, the fish won't taste "fishy", and as a rule, steelhead tastes less fishy than salmon. Also, I am not really a person who measures ingredients when I cook. I tend to pour, sprinkle, stir, taste and then adjust. Please use ingredient measurements as a guide, not as a rule.

The second important feature of this recipe is the cooking method. You cook the fish under a broiler for 7-10 minutes which crisps and blackens the outside of the flesh, yet the interior cooks evenly and is neither raw in the middle nor tough on the exterior. The caramelized sugars on the exterior accentuate the umami sensation and, man oh man, it is magical! If the fish is blackening too much (you smell a burnt aroma), put tin foil over the top of the fish once it has reached the desired stage you like (sweetened, caramelized flavors, not burnt, carbon flavors). If the skinny side of the filet is overcooking, feel free to cut it off after 5 or so minutes and let the fat part of the filet continue. Also, the fish will "coast" once out of the oven, so peek at the interior to check doneness and pull it when it is still very pink, slick, and slightly undercooked.

I suggest serving the fish with some crispy greens and one of our Pinot Noirs. I particularly think it pairs well with a young Pinot Noir as the assertiveness of the flavors in the wine match up against some of the strong blackened flavors on the outside of the fish. The



acidity in our wines will also cut the fat in the fish and elevate the aromas. Okay, that did it, I'm headed to the store to buy some steelhead right now.

**Ingredients:**

Steelhead trout filet

1 cup soy sauce

1/3 cup fish sauce

1/3 cup orange juice

1/2 cup sesame oil

2 green onions, diced

1 Tbs chopped/grated ginger

Chopped lemongrass – 2-3 inches

1/3 cup honey – drizzle over fish

¼ cup sesame seeds, to dress

Crunchy garlic chile paste to taste (optional)

**To Prepare:**

1. Combine all the ingredients (except honey) in a large bowl and whisk them together. Taste the marinade. Too much soy? Too much fish sauce? Not enough diced green onions? Not spicy enough? Adjust. No rules, use your palate as a guide.
2. Place the filet in a Pyrex or other ceramic/glass baking dish. I recommend you line it with parchment paper for ease of cleaning. Pour the marinade over the fish so it covers the entire fish and drizzle honey on top. Let it sit in the fridge for as long as you can (30 minutes to a few hours). Not enough liquid to cover? Make more or, in a pinch, flip the fish flesh side down so the “top” is steeping.
3. 20 minutes before cooking allow the fish to come to room temp. Once the oven has reached broiling temperature, slide the dish in the oven on the middle rack and set a timer. If the marinade on the fish begins to burn, tent some tin foil over the fish. Remove the fish with a spatula leaving the skin behind and pour the remaining marinade over the top of each section of fish.

