

Brandywine Table

Bringing Home the Salmon

A HUSBAND AND WIFE TEAM MAKES WILD ALASKAN SEAFOOD AVAILABLE TO LOCAL PA KITCHENS.

Alyssa Thayer

ONE MIGHT NOT EXPECT SOMEONE BORN AND raised in land-locked Pennsylvania to become a commercial Alaskan fisherman, but life is full of surprises.

For Steve Kurian, who owns *Wild For Salmon* of Bloomsburg with wife Jenn, seafood hadn't been the original plan. He graduated from Penn State University in 2001 with a degree in forestry and soon after headed to Idaho for a job. While there, his landlord invited him to Alaska for the summer to try his hand at commercial fishing.

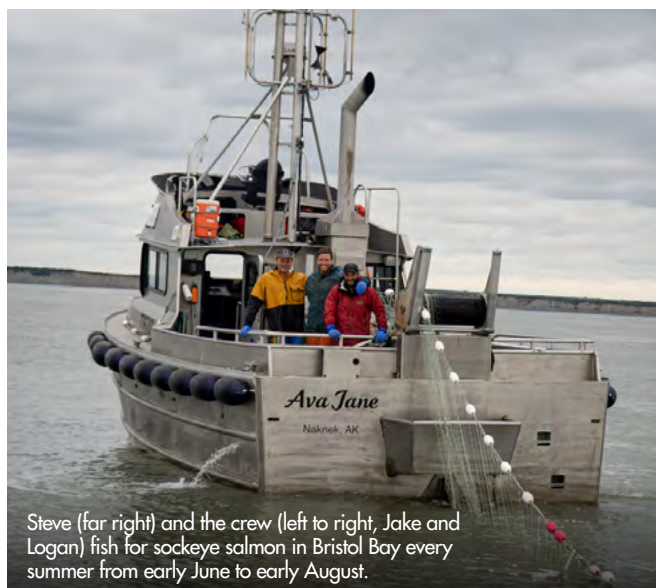
Steve and his girlfriend (now wife) Jenn spent a life-changing summer out on the water. When he was offered the chance to run his own boat the following year, Steve jumped at the opportunity.

In the off-season, the couple traveled back to Pennsylvania. "We filleted a bunch of fish and brought them back for family and friends," Steve remembers. The second season, they returned with an even bigger catch, and a friend suggested they sell at his farmers market. When their entire cooler sold in a few hours, they knew they were on to something.

to something.

In 2003 Steve and Jenn officially launched their business and settled into a new chapter, fishing summers and selling their frozen catch wholesale and direct to customers the rest of the year. They always make a point to sell out of that year's catch before returning to Alaska. "Our rule is 'no old fish,'" says Steve.

Being fisherman-owned allows them to keep their supply chain short and quality unmatched. "When you are the fisherman, you're handling the product and seeing through the whole process and delivering it to the end user," says Steve.



Steve (far right) and the crew (left to right, Jake and Logan) fish for sockeye salmon in Bristol Bay every summer from early June to early August.

Steve grew up helping his father in their backyard custom butcher shop operation. Through this, he developed strong processing skills and an appreciation for the product they were handling.

As fishermen, the couple are also directly invested in the sustainability of their livelihood. They fish in Alaska's Bristol Bay, a pristine waterway controlled not by big business, but by biologists, who monitor the overall ecosystem.

While "fresh" sounds better than "frozen," Steve explains that unless you're catching and filleting your own fish, their fast freezing process preserves the product at its peak. From the time the fish is caught to the time it's processed and frozen is only 24–36 hours. Fish transported fresh over long distances lose freshness along the way, so by the time it gets to a grocery store, it's no longer as smooth and moist.

Over time, the couple have grown their fleet and their offerings. In addition to their signature sockeye, they have smoked salmon, salmon spread and salmon burgers. They also sell other Alaskan seafood sourced from small, sustainable partner operations. *Wild For Salmon* is available locally at Kimberton Whole Foods



Owners Steve and Jenn Kurian with their children in Bristol Bay, AK summer of 2019

Salmon Wellington

Wellingtons are a well established dish, but rarely are they filled with anything other than red meat. While cooking salmon en croute sounds intimidating (how do we know when it's done) Wild for Salmon's Chef Josh assures us that if we follow the recipe, it will work out just fine!

- 3 T. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, divided
- ½ medium red onion, chopped
- 5 oz. spinach
- 2 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. pepper
- 2 T. fresh basil, chopped
- 4 oz. cream cheese
- ¼ C. shredded Parmesan cheese
- 1 sheet puff pastry, thawed to room temperature
- 1, 1.5 lb. Wild Alaska Sockeye Salmon fillet, thawed completely and skin removed
- 1 egg, beaten



Preheat oven to 425°. In a pan over medium heat, add 1 T. olive oil. Add 1 clove minced garlic and onions and cook until translucent. Add spinach, 1 teaspoon each of salt and pepper and cook until spinach is wilted. Set aside.

In a food processor, blend together the fresh basil, 1 clove garlic and remaining olive oil. Then blend in the cream cheese and Parmesan cheese until mixture is evenly combined.

On a cutting board, smooth out the sheet of puff pastry. Place several spoonfuls of the spinach mixture in the middle of the puff pastry sheet. Take the salmon portion and place on top of the bed of spinach. Salt and pepper the top of the salmon, then cover the top of the fillet with cream cheese mixture.

Fold the edges of the puff pastry over the salmon and spinach, starting with the longer sides and then the shorter ends. Trim any excess pastry from the ends, then fold the ends on top. Flip the puff pastry-wrapped salmon over and transfer to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Brush the beaten egg on the top and sides of the pastry. Score the top of the pastry with a knife, cutting shallow diagonal lines to create a crosshatch pattern. Brush the top again with the egg wash. Bake for 20–25 minutes, until pastry is golden brown. After cook-

Back to Basics

"I understand wild salmon can't feed the world, but if you have the option to choose it, do," says Steve.

Before we experiment with new flavors and techniques, here are a few key tips from the Wild for Salmon team:

Thawing: To maintain top flavor and texture of frozen fish, it's best to thaw it overnight in the refrigerator. Place the package on a plate and allow 8 to 10 hours (larger fillets take longer) for it to thaw.

Resting: Just like other meats, it's best to pull the salmon off the heat just before it reaches temperature and let it rest for 10 minutes. This helps avoid overcooking and allows the juices to be reabsorbed.

Superb Skin: Salmon skin is packed full of omega-3s and is delicious when cooked until crisp! Avoid letting it get soggy by placing it on a plate to rest, skin side up, before serving.

Repeat Heat: It's tricky to reheat salmon without drying it out completely. Steve says the key is to not overcook it the first time around, and use a pan or oven to just warm it through over low heat the second time around. "Just warm enough to enjoy, but not so it cooks more," he says.

Sautéing:

1. Thaw sockeye salmon portions and pat dry.
2. At medium-high or high heat, preheat your skillet.
3. Season the portions evenly with salt, pepper, spices and herbs.
4. Lightly oil the skillet, then place the salmon portions into the skillet, skin side down. Cook for 5 minutes or until albumin (white stuff) begins to show.
5. Flip and cook for an additional 2 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 145°.

Baking:

Rinse and pat fillets dry.

1. Spread a thin coat of oil over salmon or seafood portion.
2. Coat bottom of oven-safe pan with oil.
3. Sprinkle seasonings over fish.
4. Bake in 375° oven for 10 to 12 minutes per inch of thickness or until fish just begins to flake at the edges.

ing-transfer onto a butcher block and allow to rest. When cool, slice into portions.

Serves 2–4.

Nova Lox Salmon Quiche

This quiche does not disappoint! The savory smokiness of the salmon, the veggies and tender crust all come together into satisfying savory bites. Don't have lox available? Use leftover flaked or smoked salmon.

2021 fishing crew aboard the Ava Jane in Bristol Bay, AK



For the Crust:

- 1 C. flour
- ½ tsp. salt
- ⅓ C. butter or lard
- 3–5 T. ice water

For the Filling:

- ½ T. oil or butter
- ¼ C. onion, diced
- ¼ C. mushrooms, sliced
- 2 scallions, diced
- ¼ C. cherry tomatoes, cut in half
- ¼ lb. wild Salmon Nova Lox, thawed and cut into bite-sized pieces
- 7 eggs
- ½ C. fresh arugula or spinach, torn or chopped
- ¼ C. cheese of your choice
- ⅓ C. half n half
- ¼ tsp. salt



Mix flour and salt in a medium bowl, cut in lard or butter using a pastry cutter or fork. Continue cutting until coarse crumbs the size of peas form. Sprinkle with water, 1 tablespoon at a time, tossing with fork until mixture is moist.

Gather dough into a ball and flatten on lightly floured surface. Dust rolling pin and roll out dough into a rectangle approximately 1 inch wider than your pan.

Place dough in lightly greased pan.

Cut ½-inch slits in about 6 spots throughout the dough. Set aside. Preheat oven to 350°.

Heat oil/butter over medium heat. Sauté onions, mushrooms and scallions in oil and salt for about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes and salmon. Sauté an additional 3–4 minutes.

Whisk eggs in large bowl, then add greens, cheese and sautéed mixture.

Slowly add half and half until just combined.

Pour mixture over crust. Even out veggies and salmon as needed. Bake for 40 minutes or until egg mixture is cooked through.

Allow to cool slightly before slicing and serving.

Makes one 9-inch quiche. Serves 6–8.

Dispelling the Fishiness

Between sustainability ratings, wild vs. farm-raised, mercury levels, fresh/frozen and more, these things can all lead to fish-counter anxiety. Here's a list of FAQs and tips to help us make the very best seafood selections.

Good Lookin' – If you're purchasing fish at a fish counter, here's what to look for ... It should look smooth, moist and all together. Once it becomes dried out, it starts to separate.

Catch Color – Farm-raised salmon can be fed various ingredients that develop their color, but for wild varieties, Steve says the more vibrant the color, the better the fish has been handled.

Go Wild – Farm-raised vs. wild: quality of protein out of wild is far superior (farm-raised are fed grain and ground up fish). Steve says people often get confused when they see "Atlantic Salmon" – despite the name, it's all farm-raised.

Eat Clean – Sockeye feed on plankton and other small organisms at the bottom of the food chain. That combined with their short life span means they aren't susceptible to heavy metal accumulation (like mercury).

Freeze Please – Short of catching something yourself and frying it up, flash frozen is as fresh as it gets. Steve says when you thaw their product, it's at most 36 hours old. Shipping fresh to markets nationwide causes a degradation in the quality of fish you buy.

Sashimi-Ready – Because of the high quality and handling standards, Wild For Salmon fillets are sashimi grade, meaning they can be consumed raw without making you sick. So, you can slightly undercook it (medium rare is recommended) without food safety concerns.

Make It Moist – Fish actually keeps cooking after you take it off the heat. So if you take it off the heat when it's fully cooked, it will become overcooked as it rests. Steve recommends keeping it medium rare, which will make sure it is not overcooked by the time it's served.

Smoke Styles – We tend to use 'lox' and 'smoked salmon' interchangeably, but there's actually a difference. Lox are cured. Nova lox are cured and then cold smoked. Smoked salmon is hot smoked around 145°. There are more variations, but the main thing to remember is lox will be smooth and more "raw" tasting, sold in thin slices, while smoked salmon will be sold in a chunk and be more cooked and flaky in texture.

Premium Picks – When you're choosing a smoked salmon, check the label to make sure there aren't any chemical preservatives or dyes in it. Most premium brands will also offer more information on the type of fish it was made from (origin and variety).

Captain Steve's Easy Gravlax

The past few years have been a return to homemade and a resurgence of the DIY kitchen. This recipe is easy to follow, while still satisfying that urge to create something delicious from scratch.

- 1 C. dill, freshly chopped
- 2 T. orange zest
- 1–2 T. freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 C. Kosher salt
- ¼ C. sugar



1.5 lb. fillet sashimi grade wild sockeye salmon

Tools:

- 1 baking sheet or pan with a lip
- Plastic or cling wrap
- Refrigeratable weight (5–10 lbs.)

Note: This is a two-step process as fillet must cure overnight.

Mix dill, zest, pepper, Kosher salt and sugar in a medium bowl.

Place thawed fillet on plastic wrap and cover fish with the entire mixture. Wrap two layers of plastic wrap tightly around the fillet to seal, ensuring as much air is pressed out as possible. Double check the spices are evenly dispersed within the seal.

Place wrapped fillet on a baking sheet with a lip to contain liquid. Place weight on top.

Note: You can use all sorts of weights, but a roasting pan holding heavy cans seems to help balance and distribute the weight well.

Store in the fridge for 24 hours.

Carefully unwrap the fillet (still within the pan), lifting one end of the fillet up to scrape the salt and spices back into the pan, using a knife. Dispose of plastic and leftover salt.

Rinse the fillet in the sink and pat dry with a paper towel.

Starting with the tail end, use a sharp knife to slice thin slices down to the skin (without cutting through the skin) until you have enough for your planned serving.

Store remaining fillet whole in a ziploc bag or tupperware container until you're ready for more (lasts about a week in fridge).

Place atop crispy bread or crackers, or atop cream cheese on a bagel. Enjoy!

Serves 10–12.

Smoked Salmon Puff Pastry

This crowd-pleaser is fancy to eat but simple to make. It's the perfect festive appetizer or decadent brunch addition. The recipe is by Coley Cooks, sponsored by Wild For Salmon.

- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry, thawed but still cold
- 4 oz. cream cheese, softened at room temperature

- 2 T. sour cream
- ½ tsp. lemon zest
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- 2 T. scallions, thinly sliced (plus more for garnish)
- 2 tsp. fresh parsley, finely minced
- 2 tsp. capers, drained and rinsed
- 4–6 oz. smoked salmon



Preheat the oven to 425°.

Roll out the puff pastry so it's roughly 15 inches by 10 inches (doesn't have to be exact). Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet. Lightly dampen the edges with water, then fold them over about 1 inch to form an outer crust. Use a very sharp paring knife to trim off just the outer edge of the pastry (the corner of the fold will be too thick to cook evenly). Be careful to remove as little dough as possible. This will help the crust puff up evenly.

Use a fork to prick the inside of the dough all over. Bake until puffed and golden brown, about 15 minutes. Set aside and let cool.

While the pastry bakes, mix together the cream cheese, sour cream, lemon zest, lemon juice, scallions, parsley and capers in a bowl.

Once the pastry shell has cooled completely, spread the cream cheese mixture all over the center. Top the cream cheese mixture with large flakes of smoked salmon. Sprinkle with more scallions. Cut into wedges, then serve.

This tart can be cut into small portions and served as an appetizer, or cut into larger pieces and served with a green salad for a light lunch, or as part of a brunch spread. ♦

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.



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