

# Smoking Salmon on a Charcoal Grill

by [sleepydog](#) on July 4, 2008

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## Intro: Smoking Salmon on a Charcoal Grill

Smoking your own salmon is a relaxing way to spend a few hours on a sunny afternoon in the yard. There are a thousand recipes on the internet, this is a simple mix of the best that I found that works well. It takes a few hours of brief bits of attention, but the results are well worth the effort.



### step 1: Materials

Salmon - 4 pounds or less for a standard 22" Webber Grill

A clean, food grade tub to soak the salmon in.

3/4 cups salt (Kosher or pickling salt)

3/4 cups sugar

1/3 cup brown sugar

6 cups water

Food grade needle nose pliers (not from your workbench)

3 cups Hickory chips and a container to soak them in.

Charcoal briquettes, lighter fluid or charcoal chimney

Charcoal grill, coal tongs, spatula

Paper towels, tray (for carrying the fish), oil (for the grill), and an old, clean can (tuna works nicely)

Baste(s) (optional)

### step 2: Brine the Salmon

Mix the Brine. Take your tub (I use the a removable tray from the fridge and wash it thoroughly. It's large and gets cleaned regularly this way), add clean, cold water, salt and sugars. Stir until dissolved.

Brine the salmon. If you are using side fillets of salmon, you may have pin bones that should be removed. Run your (clean) finger tip against the grain of the fish and you'll feel them if present. They are spaced evenly, every 1/4 inch or so along the bottom of the fillet. Pull them out with your clean, food grade needle nose pliers. (come on, please buy new needle nose pliers for this job, you don't want god-knows-what on your food. Wash pliers thoroughly and coat with cooking oil to prevent rusting). If you use tail filets, you can skip the bone removal work above. Rinse the fish under cold running water and slip into your tub of brine, flesh side down. Cover the tub with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 2 hours, or in the fridge for 6 hours. I've left it overnight in the fridge without problems, but some people claim it makes the fish more salty.



### **step 3: Dry the Salmon**

Dry the salmon. After soaking in brine, wash the filets under cold running water, rub the flesh to get all the brine rinsed off. Place flesh side up on a tray covered in paper towels, blot dry with more paper towels. Allow to air dry for 30 min, until the skin feels tacky. While the salmon is drying, soak the chips, fire up the charcoal and set up the grill.



#### **step 4: Soak the Chips**

Soak the chips. Put 4 cups of hickory chips in a container and cover with water, let stand at least 20 minutes. Hickory is the traditional flavor used for smoked salmon. You can experiment with other hardwoods to get different flavors



#### **step 5: Fire up the charcoal**

Fire up the charcoal. Load up about 15 charcoal briquettes in your grill and get them lit. If you use a charcoal chimney you will help reduce the air pollution caused by using lighter fluid. (I built one out of some left over stovepipe) Once the coals are covered in white ash you're ready to smoke.



#### **step 6: Set up the grill**

Set up the grill. Clean and lightly oil the grill with a paper towel moistened with cooking oil. Make two groups of 4 (5 if your in a hurry) charcoal briquettes as close to the edge as possible. Put the rest of the briquettes somewhere safe where they will still burn. (Don't leave them in the chimney, they will burn too fast. I use a terracotta flower pot) Put some water into the clean tuna fish can and set that in the middle of the grill's bowl. Grab a small handful of hickory chips and shake the water off. Place some of moist chips on each group of coals. Place the grill over the coals at the highest setting, giving the most distance between the coals and the fish.



### step 7: Smoke that fish

Smoke that fish. Lovingly place the dry salmon filets (blot the flesh side with a paper towel again if necessary) on the grill, being careful not to place any over the coals. We want indirect, low heat. If you opt to use a basting solution, now is the time to apply it (non-basted smoked salmon is great) Put the lid on and place the vent over the fish. This will cause the smoke to swirl over the fish to escape. Set the air intake vents (at the bottom) and escape vents (in the lid) about half closed, we want a long, slow low temp (about 180 degrees) burn.



### step 8: Rework your coals and chips

Rework your coals and chips. After about 30 minutes you'll notice that the wonderfully aromatic smoke stopped coming out of your grill. Open the grill and blot your salmon dry with paper towels. Remove your grill to access the coals (unless you bought yourself a hinged grill) push the coals together (You may want to add an additional briquette, if they've burned back, try to keep about the same original mass of burning charcoal) and add another handful of hickory chips. Replace the grill and close it up. Now is a good time to add a few fresh briquettes to your off-grill burning stock, they'll come in handy later.

Repeat as necessary. Every 30-50 min or so check your grill, blot the salmon dry, add some hickory chips and a briquette now and then.



### step 9: Eat

Your salmon will be done when the thickest part of the filet flakes with a fork (but it's so tender you can eat it with a spoon). I like to smoke for 3 to 4 hours and stay toward the longer side when the fish is particularly moist, but you can have edible fish in 2 hours or less

Eat. It is great warm, but even better cold. Transfer the finished filets to a tray, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate. I can't say how long it lasts as I've never had smoked salmon last more than a few days no matter how much I make.



## Related Instructables



**Hickory smoked chicken thighs**  
by baxterdog



**Turn Gas Grill into Charcoal Grill** by Mrs. Skunkbait



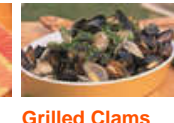
**Grill the Perfect Hamburger on a Charcoal Grill** by mChelle



**Grilled pork tenderloin swirl** by hislens



**Grilled Buffalo Wings** (video) by Handmade Kitchens



**Grilled Clams and Mussels** (video) by Handmade Kitchens



**Smoke Roasting a Chicken in a Weber** by BobCat



**BBQ Smoked Salmon** by caeric

## Comments

17 comments [Add Comment](#)



**\_Ko0LaiD\_** says:  
Perfect job! do you think this will work with rainbow?

Jul 15, 2008. 8:36 PM [REPLY](#)



**sleepydog** says:  
Thanks! Yes, trout and members of the char family are good for smoking due to their higher oil content. Just make sure you hot smoke any freshwater fish to eliminate parasites.

Jul 16, 2008. 6:47 AM [REPLY](#)



**\_Ko0LaiD\_** says:  
kool, i'll have to try it then.

Jul 16, 2008. 9:56 AM [REPLY](#)



**DrWeird117** says:  
imagine me, a knex gunner looking at this! hahaha

Jul 7, 2008. 1:19 AM [REPLY](#)



**otterpop78** says:  
Today i smoked 4 salmon filets in my little chief. We have found that cherry wood goes great with the salmon after an over night brining... use soy rather than salt for that.... yummy.

Jul 6, 2008. 12:17 AM [REPLY](#)



**sleepydog** says:  
Where do you get your cherry wood and what is the salt to soy sauce equivalence (1 cup equals 1 cup)?

Jul 6, 2008. 7:01 AM [REPLY](#)



**otterpop78** says:

I buy Cherry chips and chunks from my local BiMart... My wife usually handles the brine, she says cut back the salt and replace it with soy... pretty much what you said there... enough to make the brine kinda murky. Makes some tasty treats.

Jul 6, 2008. 6:07 PM [REPLY](#)



**tyep** says:

Sounds like a good recipe I'll have to try it, but you forgot to mention that you should only use wild Alaskan salmon, not any of that drugged up farm stuff.

Jul 5, 2008. 10:25 AM [REPLY](#)



**sleepydog** says:

Tyep's right, if you eat salmon more than once every month or two, you should stick with the wild salmon and reduce the amount of PCBs you are ingesting.

<http://www.healthcastle.com/farmed-salmon.shtml>

Jul 6, 2008. 7:15 AM [REPLY](#)



**tachikomatic** says:

Charcoal grill, coal **thongs** , spatula

Pretty sure you meant to say tongs, but maybe not. :P

I love smoked salmon with a passion, great instructable.

Jul 5, 2008. 5:42 PM [REPLY](#)



**sleepydog** says:

Nice catch. Cooking and thongs don't mix. (fixed now)

Jul 6, 2008. 7:07 AM [REPLY](#)



**otterpop78** says:

I have heard that a slightly higher temp, around 230 degrees , is optimal for smoking. mine runs slightly higher than that, and it still works well...

Jul 6, 2008. 12:22 AM [REPLY](#)



**sleepydog** says:

Temperature and smoking time are inversely proportional. The hotter you smoke, the quicker you're done. Smoking above 150 degrees kill any parasites in the fish.

Jul 6, 2008. 6:58 AM [REPLY](#)



**otterpop78** says:

lolz in my house we can NEVER make enough. we are lucky if it finishes out the day with a piece or two left

Jul 6, 2008. 12:23 AM [REPLY](#)



**mt\_si\_dad** says:

Hickory might be traditional in the east, but I suspect it's alder in the west.

Jul 5, 2008. 3:45 PM [REPLY](#)



**pyro13** says:

ah man this looks good. I love fish!!!

Jul 5, 2008. 10:36 AM [REPLY](#)



**LinuxH4x0r** says:

Great job! I love smoked salmon. (Smoked walleye is also really good!)

Jul 5, 2008. 10:29 AM [REPLY](#)