

Salmon Savvy:

Availability:

Most supermarkets stock farm-raised salmon year-round, and it's usually of very high quality. Pacific salmon, from late spring through fall. Available in whole and half fish,

fillets and bone-in steaks.

How to buy:

In addition to the usual guidelines for buying fresh fish (it should smell good and look bright, clean and moist), judge salmon by its color. King, coho and farm-raised salmon are deep, rich orange, and sockeye is almost red. Chum and pink tend to have more washed-out, pinkish flesh.

Storage:

Wrapped, surrounded by ice, in the refrigerator, for as little time as possible, but up to three days. Good salmon can also be frozen, tightly wrapped, for 1 month.

Preparation:

Skin or scale fillets if you like; trim loose belly flaps from steak for neatness. Remove pin bones from fillets. (use needle-nose pliers)

Cooking:

Salmon can be cooked by whatever technique you like. The cooking time for salmon varies according to your taste. I prefer my salmon cooked medium-rare to medium. Remember that fish retains enough heat to continue cooking after it has been removed from the heat source, so stop cooking just before the salmon reaches the point you'd consider it done. (The National Fisheries Institute recommends that consumers cook all fish until it loses its translucent [raw] appearance, to an internal temperature of 140 degrees)

Grilling:

Lay the salmon steaks crosswise on the grill; turn only once and place on the grill going the other way. Grill skin-on fillets without turning at all; cover the grill for the last two minutes of cooking to finish.

Broiling:

Turn steaks once. Fillets, with skin on or off, need not be turned; the heat of the pan will suffice to cook the underside.

Pan-cooking:

Cook skin-on fillets with no added fat and finish in the broiler. Peel skin off after cooking.

Poaching:

You don't need fancy court bouillon to poach salmon; it has enough flavor already. Just be careful not to overcook. Peel skin off after poaching.

Roasting:

Because salmon (and most other fish) cooks so quickly, roasting does not give it a nice brown crust, as broiling does. But roasting is easy and foolproof - the fish will not catch on fire - and if you turn the fillets or steaks in seasoned oil before putting them in the oven, the flavor is magnificent.