

Gravad Lax

'Gravad Lax' or [gravlax](#) is Swedish for 'buried salmon' or 'salmon of the grave' since it originates from when fishermen saved some of their catch by salting and burying it in it's 'grave' - the beach. The preservative effect of salt curing slows decomposition just as well then as it does now - a lot easier than smoking and fresher flavour!



Because cure with additional herbs and spices changes the texture and flavour of the fish, gravad lax is good for farmed salmon which is not the same quality and leanness as wild. Gravad lax is 'wet' dry cured, unsmoked, and not a pickled like sousing or immersion in brine. You can even get acceptable results with frozen fish so there is no excuse for not buying a whole salmon occasionally taking off a couple of steaks and curing a fillet or two. Just buy as fresh as you can which is the main conditioner of quality when cured.

To begin, gut then [fillet your fish](#) leaving the skin on using the head to hold on to then trim off the fins and tidy up the two resulting fillets. If you are not familiar with gutting and filleting first rinse your fish under the tap holding it up with your forefinger and thumbs under the gills. Next, locate the vent just behind the dorsal fins and insert a small filleting or boning knife about 15mm deep with the blade facing

the head and draw the knife upwards in one long stroke all the way to the head trying not to pierce the guts as you do so. Next, under a running tap, insert your forefinger and thumb beneath the guts and run your fingers up to the head and hook the guts out with your fingers. A little pinch and twist at the top beneath the head should remove the guts cleanly.

Dispose of the guts then rinse your hands then the gut cavity, towel dry sufficiently to handle, then place your fish side down on a worktop head facing away from your working hand and remove the fins with a knife or scissors. Take a sharp boning knife then, at a slight angle towards the head, run the knife across the flesh and down vertically to the spine whilst holding the head with your free hand then turn right at 90 degrees and run the knife along the spine down too the tail releasing the fillet as you go (with practice you can do this in one movement!). Turn over the fish and repeat then bin the head and bin or pop in a pot to make fish stock.

Next hang a fillet over the palm of your hand so that you can feel and see the pin bones just sticking up from the fillet and take your knife and put the blade just under the head of the pin brine and use your thumb against the blade to can purchase and tug the pin bone out (Alternatively use tweezers if you can't manage it with your knife). Repeat until you have boned the fillets. Leave the skin on the fillet to slow the curing rate and give you a handle to cut the gravad lax (and free sandpaper) later.

Basic cure

150g sea salt

150g white cane or light Demerara sugar

30g coriander seed

50g black peppercorns

bunch of fresh dill

Finely chop a bunch of dill stalks with a bit of leaf and set aside ready since the cure quickly releases free water from the flesh so you have to work quickly and methodically. Grind the dry ingredients in a pestle and mortar or hand blender and lay the salmon fillets skin down in a non-reactive tray then rub well with cure. Aim to have 2-3mm cure along the thick section like a Mohican haircut and less near the tail so not to over-cure it.