

Dry Brine Recipe and Smoking Instructions for Trout, Steelhead and Salmon

By Donn Vey



Figure 1 The author on the left with Darrell & Dad's Family Guide Service CFO, Sandra Jones and a nice mess of Roses rainbows

I have used this recipe for over 30 years to do a moist, savory and flaky smoked fish. I have processed thousands of Lake Chelan Mackinaw in the past 15 years with excellent results. The best fish from our area North Central Washington for this recipe are Lake Chelan Mackinaw, Rufus Woods Triploid Rainbows and Upper Columbia Sockeye. To get the best flavor the fish should be red meated and have plenty of oil in the meat.

Ingredients:

10# of Iodized or Sea Salt

5# Dark or Light Brown Sugar

5# White Sugar

5 Tablespoons of Black Pepper

1 ¼ Teaspoon of Powdered Cloves

1 ¼ Teaspoon of Powdered Cinnamon

Bay Leaves are Optional

Mix the ingredients thoroughly in a Plastic Tub or 5 Gallon bucket

Fillet the fish and lay them skin side down on the grates

Use a big old salt shaker with larger holes so you can sprinkle the brine evenly. Obviously, you want less on smaller fillets and more on larger fillets. I have recycled a 42 ounce Johnny's Seasoning Salt container to sprinkle my brine.

Let the brine work (melt) into the flesh of larger fish for about 1.5 to 2 hours and 1 hour for smaller fish.

Set your smoker to 120 – 135 degrees F without smoke so that it is up to that temperature by the time the fillets are brined.

Oil your grates so the smoked fillets will slide off easily

Set the fillets on the grates leaving 1 to 1.5 inches between them so the smoke and heat can circulate evenly between them.

Use Alder, Apple, Cherry or any other fruitwood. Refrain from using evergreen woods as the resin will ruin the smoked fish. Add chips, chunks, pellets and sawdust every 1.5 to 2 hours. I fill the old 6" cast iron frying pan 3 times during the smoking process. Small fish will take about 5 hours. Larger fish can take 6.5 to 10 hours or more. The smoking time can be weather dependent. The colder weather in the winter makes it take longer and the hot summer weather makes it go faster. You must pay some attention to the smoker until you are certain that you have a consistent temperature.

Old refrigerators from the 30s and 40s work best because of their all metal construction, insulation and large capacity. You will need to customize it by adding shelves, adding a thermometer through the front and cutting a hole in the bottom to string out an electrical cord from the hot plate you need to install. Get a good hot plate that will allow you to tightly control the temperature. Don't forget to fashion a foil tent that will keep drippings from the fish from getting into the chip pan or on the burner of the hot plate.

Telling when the fish are done is a bit of an art learned by trial and error, but the basic principle is to push on the fillets with a finger and remove the fillets when they no longer have a spongy feel. The texture you are shooting for is that they should flake apart when bent, yet still be plenty moist.

When we are planning on storing the smoked fish we vacuum seal them. If you get a tight vacuum they will last in excess of 6 months in the refrigerator. Do not

freeze them. It alters both the texture and the flavor. Once the fillets are exposed to air in your refrigerator they will begin to mold in about 10 to 14 days.

I am retired in Manson now, but I spent my working career in the meat and fish industry. I owned and operated Donn's Quality Meats and Seafoods in Bellevue from 1961 to 1964. After that I spent 25 years in wholesale meat management for K&N Meats of Bellevue and Seattle.



Figure 2 A couple of Lake Chelan smoked

Mackinaw, ready to eat!

When you fish with us, we offer the additional service of smoking the fish that are caught and turning them into a long-lasting delicacy to share with friends. To avoid the cost of shipping and handling, we will swap you out pound for pound fish that have already been smoked so that you can take it with you that day. Be sure to ask us for free samples while we are out fishing.