

Missouri take on a French seasonal salad

By [Marcia Vanderlip](#)

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Bernadette Dryden/Courtesy

A Midwestern take on a classic French Nicoise salad. This one is made with Missouri paddlefish.

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In her new cookbook, “Cooking Wild in Missouri” (Conservation Department of Missouri, 2011), Bernadette Dryden notes that “paddlefish (also known as spoonbill) are a prehistoric fish found only in the tributaries of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and in the Yangtze River in China.” The Conservation Department “raises young paddlefish at Blind Pony Hatchery in Sweet Springs to stock the waters of Table Rock and Truman lakes, and Lake of the Ozarks.” She mentions that they are not pretty but make for “some fine eatin.’ ”

SMOKED PADDLEFISH (OR TROUT) NICOISE

Salad Nicoise is one of my favorite summer patio meals, and I never tire of it. I take great liberties with the traditional French recipe (made with tuna) — changing it up every time I make it with different fish and vegetables. I use whatever is fresh and seasonal or whatever is in the fridge that needs eating.

— Bernadette Dryden

For the salad:

2 pounds smoked paddlefish or trout

1/2 pound green beans, cooked (in season)

12 small, new potatoes

20 cherry tomatoes, or other tomatoes

3 ears of corn, cooked and cut off cob

8 small beets, red or golden, cooked

12 Kalamata olives

2 hard-cooked eggs

1 medium red onion, sliced

1/4 cup finely chopped fresh parsley (also chives and basil in season)

Optional: avocado, mushrooms, sweet red or yellow bell pepper

For lemon vinaigrette:

1 large lemon

Extra-virgin olive oil

Garlic

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Lemon zest

A couple of hours before serving, I usually steam all the vegetables that need cooking, let them cool and then cut them just before composing them on the platter. To compose, place fish in the center of the platter and surround it with vegetables, keeping each in separate groups. Stud the display with olives and eggs, arrange red onion slices over all and sprinkle with parsley. Generously drizzle lemon vinaigrette over all minutes before serving.

Serve with chunks of crusty bread and your favorite summer white wine.

Servings: 4

For smoking fish:

This recipe can be used for all kinds of fish, including catfish, trout, paddlefish and salmon.

2 quarts water

1 cup salt

1/3 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup lemon juice

1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic

4 pounds fish

Mix the first five ingredients (through garlic) thoroughly and pour into a large rectangular ceramic or glass pan. Add fillets or whole fish to brine, making sure liquid covers them completely. Cover, chill and soak 30 to 40 minutes. (Don't soak longer, or you will risk the fish being too salty.)

Remove from brine (don't rinse) and put directly in smoker. Put thicker fish on top rack. Smoke approximately 1-1/2 to 2 hours, until meat is flaky.

Smoking tips: I use a very basic two-tiered charcoal smoker. I like to use the lump charcoal rather than briquettes. Light the charcoal after you put the fish in the brine. At the same time, put about a quart of hickory wood chips or twigs to soak in a pan or small bucket of water. When the coals are ready, drain the wood chips and add to the coals. Don't take the lid off the smoker during the first hour.

— *Bernadette Dryden*

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