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Last modified: Tuesday, July 21, 2009 1:12 PM CDT



Keta salmon comes to the summer dinner table from the Yukon River.

HOME PLATE: Fresh salmon means summer to Alaskan taste buds

## By Janice Denham

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The beauty and vastness of Yukon River country awes visitors to Alaska. The delicious flavor of fresh salmon caught in that river strikes them, too.

Summer's list of enjoyable meals here anticipates freshly caught salmon. This year both Dierbergs and Schnuck Markets are offering the Yukon keta (chum) variety for a couple of weeks now, and will again stock it in August.

Fished from open skiffs by Alaskan Yup'ik Eskimos near the river's mouth, the salmon are high in healthy oils because their anticipated run up the Yukon would require fuel for 2,000 miles. Supplied by Kwik-pak Fisheries, the fish can be traced to its origin.

Nancy Wangles, director of deli and seafood at Dierbergs, expects this keta salmon to be higher in fat and more tender than the usual keta - and to cost about half the price of sockeye salmon.

"This keta, I understand, can be caught in nets for more quantity," she said.

These salmon runs, according to Kwik-pak, are monitored for sustainability. To avoid over-fishing, enough fish are allowed up the river to spawn for the future.

Todd Vasel of Dierbergs' marketing department said knowing the catch's wild source lets

consumers compare salmon from different regions. Copper River, shorter and farther south, has been a popular source in recent years.

Wangles follows the lead of Alaskans in cooking salmon. She grills it.

She soaks a cedar plank in water at least overnight to avoid burning, increase flavor and ensure moistness. She often adds a seasoning rub on top, when she places it skin-side down on the moist plank.

She cooks it, without flipping it, in a covered gas grill preheated to 350 to 400 degrees about 20 minutes until the flesh flakes.

Kwik-pak is providing both supermarket chains with in-store recipes. Its grilled salmon with salmonberry gastrique can be adapted to Midwestern ingredients.

Salmonberries, which grow from the Pacific Northwest into Alaska, look like raspberries. Other berries are easy fruit replacements - and provide more flavor. A resulting sweet-tart blend, developed with heat, flavors both greens and grilled fish.

More information about Yukon keta salmon is found on the website http://www.kwikpakfisheries.com.

Grilled Salmon with Salmonberry Gastrique

1/3 cup oil, preferably canola and olive oil blend

3 pints salmonberries (strawberries, raspberries or blackberries can be used)

1/2 cup red wine vinegar

1 cup sugar

1 large shallot, peeled, minced

Juice of 1 lemon

2 to 4 sprigs fresh thyme

4 (6 oz. each) keta salmon fillets

Salt and pepper to taste

In saucepan, bring 2 pints berries, red wine vinegar, sugar, shallot, lemon juice and thyme, stirring occasionally, to boil. Reduce heat. Simmer 20 to 30 minutes. Puree and strain through fine mesh. If necessary to balance flavor, adjust with a little lemon juice or sugar. Let come to room temperature for serving.

Season salmon with salt, pepper and oil. Use nonstick rack or season with oil, then preheat grill. Cook salmon flesh-side down. Cook to brown surface, then rotate (do not flip) 90 degrees and cook to create grill marks. Flip over fish and repeat rotation process. Total cooking should take 10 to 12 minutes.

Place salmon on warm serving dishes. Drizzle 1 or 2 tablespoons berry gastrique on top.

Meal idea: Toss salad greens with bit of vinaigrette and berry mixture. Serve with grilled onion wedge at edge of salmon.