

Mediterranean fish stew

Inspired by Provençal Bouillabaisse and Italy's Cioppino, I give you my own chunky Mediterranean fish stew featuring fennel, olives and a wide variety of fish and seafood. Serves 5.

8 oz cod, halibut, monkfish, mahi-mahi, sea scallops or another firm white fish, cut into 1-inch chunks	a generous pinch of saffron
8 oz salmon fillet, skinned, cut into 1-inch chunks	½ cup dry white wine (if you don't consume alcohol, replace with ½ cup chicken stock and 1 tsp lemon juice)
8 oz medium shrimp (defrosted, if previously frozen), peeled	2½ cups chicken bone broth
2 tbsp fresh lemon juice	12 pitted black olives, coarsely chopped
½ tsp salt	14 oz tomatoes, finely diced or pureed (if using canned tomatoes, try to find San Marzanos)
½ tsp freshly ground black pepper	1 tbsp tomato paste
1 tsp fresh thyme leaves or 2 tsp dried	1 lb fresh mussels, soaked for 15 minutes in a bowl of cold salt water, green "beards" removed with a sharp kitchen knife. <i>(The shells should be closed tightly. If you find any mussels with open shells, gently tap them on the counter, wait a minute, and see if they close. Discard any don't close, or those with chipped or cracked shells.)</i>
2 tbsp olive oil	½ cup parsley, coarsely chopped
1 large onion, finely cubed	1 tbsp Thai fish sauce (my favorite is Red Boat)
3 cloves garlic, crushed	a generous squeeze of lemon juice
1 fennel bulb, quartered, cored and thinly sliced (reserve the fennel weed for garnish)	
2 medium carrots, sliced	
1 tbsp dried mixed Italian herbs	
2 tsp sweet paprika powder	
a pinch red pepper flakes	

Place the cubed fish and peeled shrimp in a shallow bowl and sprinkle with the lemon juice, salt, pepper and thyme. Let marinate for 30 minutes while you prep all the other ingredients.

In a large, heavy bottomed pot or Dutch oven, warm the olive oil and cook onion until translucent, stirring frequently (5 minutes). Add garlic, fennel, carrots, Italian herbs, red pepper flakes and saffron and cook another 2-3 minutes, stirring. Add wine (if using), stock, tomatoes, tomato paste and olives, stir and bring to a boil. Cover and cook on low-medium heat for 15 minutes until the vegetables are soft.

Now add the fish and seafood to the soup base, starting with the slowest-cooking ones (e.g., monkfish, mahi-mahi, clams), followed 2 minutes later by the mussels and cod, and finally the shrimp (which need only about 2 minutes' cooking time). Cover the pot while the fish & seafood are cooking. As soon as the mussel shells have opened and the shrimp are pink all the way through, remove from heat. Discard any mussels that do not open during cooking.

Season the stew with Thai fish sauce and lemon juice; don't stir aggressively to avoid breaking up the fish chunks. Sprinkle with parsley and fennel weed. Can be eaten immediately but tastes even better after the flavors have been able to meld for a few hours or overnight in the fridge.

Keeps 3-4 days in the fridge; can be frozen.

Nutrition information (per serving of 5): Calories 379, Fat 15 g, Sodium 1,130 mg, Total Carbohydrate 19 g, Dietary Fiber 5 g, Net Carbohydrate 14 g, Sugars 8 g, Protein 38 g.

