

# fish under wraps

Easier than you think, seafood steamed in banana or grape leaves is delicious and healthy.

**cooks** all around the world prepare seafood wrapped in leaves. When steamed, the all-natural bundles produce moist, flavorful morsels of shellfish or finfish, and the green packages make a beautiful presentation.

Placed on a hot grill, these packets won't burn or fall apart. And because the leaves are biodegradable, you can toss them into the garbage or onto your compost heap.

Look for fresh banana leaves in gourmet, Asian, or Mexican markets. Choose pliable greens with no signs of browning. Trim to desired size, and remove the spine. If necessary, dip in boiling water a few seconds to soften. When using banana leaves from your garden, be sure they have not been exposed to any chemicals. Mail-order sources such as [gourmetsleuth.com](http://gourmetsleuth.com) sell frozen banana leaves year-round. When buying or ordering, remember that the leaves can grow to 8 feet long, so one leaf may be enough for your recipes.

Readily available in well-stocked markets, bottled grape leaves usually can be found in the condiment section or ethnic food aisle in your grocery store. Rinse the leaves, which are tightly packed in brine, to remove excess salt, then snip off tough stem ends. Some brands have smaller leaves than others; if so, overlap several leaves to compensate.

## tips for cooking in leaves

- Remove packets from the heat sooner rather than later—the seafood will continue to cook in the leaves.
- Add an outer layer of aluminum foil to support the bundle when using large leaf sections, as with the grilled shrimp recipe below. Previously frozen banana leaves tend to be more fragile than fresh.



Grilled Shrimp in Banana-leaf Pouch

## Grilled Shrimp in Banana-leaf Pouch

*This recipe also works well with scallops, mussels, or clams. If banana leaves are unavailable, use two layers of aluminum foil and reduce cooking time to 5 to 7 minutes.*

- 1 pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion, divided
- 1 cup chopped red bell pepper, divided
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 cup Thai basil leaves, roughly torn
- 2 teaspoons ground coriander
- 2 teaspoons hot sauce (optional)
- Salt and pepper to taste

- 4 (10- x 15-inch) pieces banana leaves, trimmed and wiped with damp cloth
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro

Toss shrimp with lime juice.

Combine ½ cup onion, ½ cup bell pepper, and garlic in the bowl of a food processor; pulse until finely chopped. Combine shrimp with onion mixture, remaining onion and bell pepper, and next 3 ingredients.

Season with salt and pepper.

Place one banana leaf on a 12- x 16-inch piece of aluminum foil. Spread half of the shrimp mixture in center of leaf. Cover it with second banana leaf and another 12- x 16-inch piece of foil. Roll 4 edges of foil over tightly to form a pouch. Repeat with remaining banana leaves, foil, and shrimp.

Grill pouches, covered with grill lid, over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes. Remove pouches from grill. Remove foil; place pouches onto serving plates. Cut a slit in center of leaves, and peel back. Sprinkle with cilantro. Makes 2 servings.

## Grilled Salmon in Grape Leaves with Tomato-Raisin Relish

- 4 (6-ounce) salmon fillets (about 1 inch thick)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 12 large grape leaves (packed in brine), drained, rinsed, and patted dry with paper towels

Olive oil  
Tomato-Raisin Relish

Sprinkle salmon fillets evenly with salt and pepper; set aside.

Snip off any protruding stems from grape leaves. Place 2 or 3 overlapping

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Grilled Salmon in Grape Leaves with Tomato-Raisin Relish

grape leaves on work surface. Place one salmon fillet, skin-side down, in center of leaves. Fold grape leaves up and over salmon, patting down gently to seal as much as possible. Brush leaves with olive oil to help seal edges. Repeat with remaining salmon and grape leaves.

Grill packets, covered with grill lid, over medium heat (300° to 350°) 5 to 6 minutes on each side or until desired degree of doneness. (Grape leaves will be lightly charred.) Serve immediately with Tomato-Raisin Relish. Makes 4 servings.

*Tomato-Raisin Relish*

- 1/4 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup golden raisins
- 1/2 cup hot water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup diced onion
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 1 cup seeded and chopped plum tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons grated lemon rind
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 cup pitted kalamata olives, coarsely chopped
- 1 tablespoon capers, drained
- 1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Soak raisins in 1/2 cup hot water 10 minutes; drain.

Heat oil over medium heat until hot. Add onion, and sauté 3 minutes or until crisp-tender. Add garlic, and sauté 1 minute. Stir in tomatoes, lemon rind, and lemon juice; cook 4 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in olives, raisins, and remaining ingredients. Makes 2 cups.



Coriander-Cumin Steamed Fish Packets

**Coriander-Cumin Steamed Fish Packets**

*Coriander and cumin seeds can be bought already ground. But for better flavor and shelf life, buy the seeds and grind them with a mortar and pestle or spice grinder (clean coffee grinders work, too).*

- 4 (6-ounce) cod, snapper, or other thick white fish fillets
  - 1/4 teaspoon salt
  - 6 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, divided
  - 1 tablespoon ground coriander
  - 1 tablespoon ground cumin
  - 2 tablespoons chopped garlic
  - 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves
  - 4 (12- x 12-inch) pieces banana leaves, trimmed and wiped with a damp cloth
- Garnishes: lemon wedges, cilantro leaves*

Slice fish fillets horizontally (not all the way through) to create pockets. Sprinkle with salt and 4 tablespoons lemon juice.

Pulse remaining 2 tablespoons lemon juice and next 4 ingredients in a food processor until they become a paste. Rub paste on both sides of each fillet, filling pockets. Marinate in refrigerator 30 minutes.

Place one fish fillet in center of each banana leaf. Fold in left side of leaf, then right side, and roll to form a packet. Place on a steamer rack or basket, seam-side down, to keep leaves from opening. Repeat with remaining fillets and banana leaves.

Fill a large Dutch oven with 1 inch of water; bring to boil. Lower steamer rack into pan slowly. Cover and steam fish packets 8 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Remove from steamer; unwrap each packet. Arrange on a platter, and garnish, if desired. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings. 🍃