

# The Salt story

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**CURING:** Cure is the generic term used to indicate brines, pickling or corning solutions or dry cures. When salt in the form of a dry cure or brine, is applied to a food, the food is referred to as cured, brined, pickled or corned.

## TYPES OF SALT

**SEASONED SALT:** This is refined salt containing several spices including Oregano and Black Pepper. It can be used in all savoury and meat dishes.

**HIMALAYAN SALT:** This salt is procured from the east Punjab, Pakistan, and often used to cook seafood on top of the salt block.

**TABLE SALT:** Rock salt, obtained from underground deposits, is usually refined and especially treated to prevent caking - magnesium carbonate is added to help make it run more easily.

**CRYSTAL ROCK SALT:** Obtained from underground deposits, this salt is less refined than table salt.

**SEA SALT:** This is produced by evaporating sea water. The process is more expensive than salt produced from mines. Sea salt comes in fine-grain or large crystals. Many of these salts are refined and use some of the same additives as table salt.

**SOUR SALT:** Sour salt, or citric salt, is not salt at all but crystallised citric acid extracted from lemons or limes; it gives tartness to some Middle Eastern and Jewish dishes. It is used to add an extra tart flavour to sour dough and rye breads. It may be used in canning to prevent fruit from turning dark.

**KITCHEN SALT:** This is refined rock salt, with no additives, most commonly used for pickling or curing meats.

**ROCK SALT:** This is a salt that is purified by a process similar to sea salt, boiling down and crystallising the saline to varying degrees of fineness to produce cooking or kitchen salt, and table salt. It is a large crystal salt that has a slightly grayish colour. It is less refined and still contains minerals that are removed from normal table salt. Rock salt

has a few culinary uses such as in mechanical ice cream makers, and is sometimes used as a bed for serving certain types of shellfish.

**BLACK SALT:** Named *Kala Namak* in India, it is really a blend of minerals characterised by a strong sulfur odour. It is commonly used in snack foods in North India.

**MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE (MSG):** It is flavourless in itself but adds flavour to other foods. It is used as a salt substance.

**TENDERISING SALT:** Ordinary salt containing 2-3 % papain. It is for tenderising meat, and for domestic use only (prohibited in butcher's shop, delicatessens and restaurants).

**IODISED SALT:** A mixture of table salt and Sodium Iodide, and sold as table salt.

**KOSHER SALT:** Pure refined rock salt because it does not contain Magnesium Carbonate, it will not cloud items to which it is added. Kosher salt is required for "Koshering" foods that must meet Jewish dietary guidelines.



## SOME USEFUL INFORMATION:

Adding salt to water will raise the temperature at which it boils and lower the temperature at which it freezes.

Though we need some salt in our diet, excess consumption is unwise. Too much salt can lead to high blood pressure.

Salt is a terrific flavour enhancer, helping to reduce bitterness and acidity, and bringing out other flavours in the food.

Adding salt to bread dough controls the action of the yeast and improves the flavour. Bread made without salt will have a coarser texture and a blander flavour than bread made with salt.

Try sprinkling salt on citrus fruit, melons,

tomatoes, and even wine to enhance flavour.

Adding a little salt balances, the flavour of sweets like cakes, cookies, and candies.

Boiling eggs in salted water makes them easier to peel.

Adding a pinch of salt (preferably non-iodized) to cream or egg whites before they're whipped increases their volume and serves as a stabiliser.

Salt is a mineral, so it can be stored indefinitely without going stale. It won't taste any fresher if you grind it with a salt mill.

Salt has been used for millennia as a preservative for meats, fish, cheese, and



other foods. It works by absorbing moisture from the cells of bacteria through osmosis, which kills them or leaves them unable to reproduce.

Salting slices of eggplants helps draw out the bitter juices.

Sprinkling salt on meat before broiling or grilling it draws moisture from the centre, making it browner on the outside, but less juicy on the inside.

## WHOLE BAKED FISH IN SEA SALT

I know, reading the article and the name of the dish, one might be hesitant at first, and it might seem a little unappetising. But let's put scepticism aside and move ahead in the interest of trying something new.

So what is a salt crust, and how does it work? It's a mixture of salt crystals and egg whites. You completely surround the fish—or chicken or beef—with the salt mixture, creating a hard crust that traps moisture. This effectively steams the meat, making it tender and moist.

To prepare the salt-crust fish, first have the fish cleaned and gutted.

## Ingredients

2 lemons; 1 zested and juiced, 1 sliced into thin rounds

1 bunch fresh thyme, half picked and half left whole, plus a pinch extra for garnish

4 fresh bay leaves, coarsely snipped using scissors

3 cloves garlic, smashed

9 egg whites, 8 cups salt

1 whole fish (roughly 450g)

High-quality olive oil

## Method

Preheat the oven to 230°C. In a food processor or blender, blend together the lemon juice and zest, the picked thyme, chopped bay leaves and garlic (add a bit of the egg whites if it needs more liquid to blend together); blend it until it becomes a thick paste. Add the rest of the egg whites and blend again until foamy and well incorporated. Then combine this mixture in a large bowl with the salt and mix well. In a baking sheet or roasting pan, spread less than half of the salt-cake mixture on the bottom, then place the fish on top. Stuff the inside of the fish with the lemon rounds and whole branches of herbs, and cover the top and sides with the remaining salt mixture. Press firmly to create a crust encasing the fish, ensuring there are no gaps or air bubbles. Roast the fish for 25 minutes; use a thermometer to poke through the salt cake in a few places to confirm the internal temperature of the fish is at a minimum of 62.8° C. Use a wooden spoon or mallet to crack open the salt cake and carefully remove the fish. Use a brush or clean towel to remove any excess salt and then transfer the fish to a cutting board. Fillet the fish by first removing the skin on top, then using a butter knife to slide under the top, fillet right above the spine and transfer that fillet to a plate. Remove the spine from the tail end, then use the knife to remove the bottom fillet, leaving the skin behind. Repeat for second piece. Drizzle just a bit of olive oil, lemon juice and lemon wedges over the fillets, garnish with a pinch of fresh herbs, and enjoy with some butter tossed asparagus/kalian/pak choy.



Photo courtesy: Subhabrata Maitra

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