

Ilish for every palate

Recipes by Selina Parvin
KASUNDI HILSA

Ingredients

1 kg hilsa fish (cut into pieces)
¼ cup mango kasundi
1 tbsp mustard paste
2 tsp red chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric powder
¼ cup mustard oil
Salt to taste

Method

Cut and wash the fish pieces. Marinate with salt, turmeric and keep aside for 10 minutes. Heat oil in a pan, put all the spice powders and pastes. Cook for a while. Add little water to it. Add salt, jaggery, and mango-kasundi. Stir for 5-6 minutes. Put hilsa and some water in it, if required. Cook for 10 minutes with the lid on in low heat. When the gravy is thick, remove the pan. The hilsa is ready to serve.

BHAPA ILISH

Ingredients

6 pieces hilsa fish
1 tbsp mustard seed paste
1 tsp red chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric powder
3 green chillies
Salt to taste
2 tbsp mustard
1 tbsp lemon juice

Method

Mix all the ingredients except the green chillies. Leave them for half an hour. Grease an aluminium container with mustard oil. Put the fish pieces. Pour a bit of mustard



oil and green chillies. Now, heat water in a deep bottomed vessel. Put the aluminium container in the water and cover it. Put something heavy on the lid. Water should not get inside the container. Cook for 1 hour or until the fish gets completely done. Remove from heat and serve.

Recipes By Zinat Sultana

HILSA IN MUSTARD GRAVY (SHORSHE ILISH)

Serves: 3
Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 10 minutes
Complexity: Easy

Ingredients

6 pieces hilsa fish
½ cup onion, chopped
2 tbsp onion paste
2 tbsp mustard paste
2 tbsp red chilli powder
10 green chillies
½ tsp turmeric powder
4 tbsp mustard oil
1 tsp sugar
Salt, to taste
1 cup water

Method

Marinate the hilsa pieces with salt and turmeric powder for 10 minutes. Take chopped onions, onion paste, mustard paste, red chilli powder, sugar, and 3 tablespoons of mustard oil together in a cooking bowl and mix them very well. Now

put this paste over the hilsa pieces. Add water, adjust the salt and cover the lid. Cook for 10 minutes. Add green chillies and 1 tablespoon of mustard oil. Turn off the heat. Cover the lid for five more minutes, and then serve hot with plain rice.

HILSA PILAF (ILISH POLAO)

Serves: 4
Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 45 minutes
Complexity: Difficult

Ingredients

For the hilsa—
6 pieces hilsa fish
½ cup onion, chopped
½ cup onion paste
1 tbsp garlic paste
½ tsp ginger paste
2/3 tsp turmeric powder

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Mustard ilish: Taste it or miss it

"Nothing can stop the saliva coming out of your tongue when you hear the name again. If you have ever tasted it, you can feel the taste. In case you haven't, I'm sure you will set your mind on it after listening to me." I get this straightforward answer from Shabnam Ferdousy, one of my university friends, when I ask her to tell me about her favourite mustard ilish recipe.

The nutritious anadromous-migratory-fish, ilish (Hilsa), has merged with Bengali tradition over the years. It is one of the most favourite dishes of Bengalis and is cooked in almost every home in both Bangladesh and West Bengal. Ilish was recognized as a GI-product of Bangladesh in 2016. It also contains a lot of essential fatty acids that are very beneficial for health.

For Shabnam, ilish is associated with cherished memories of mother, who passed away in 2014. From childhood, Shabnam would see her mother cooking ilish with special care. In her own words, 'Ilish is not

just a fish for me; when I cook ilish, I can feel my mother's love here.'

Like an experienced food-critic, Shabnam describes the dos and don'ts perfectly, from buying the fish to cooking it. "It is a unique fish, so, you have to be very cautious at every step," she states, "Ilish is eaten more or less throughout the year. Seasonal fish is the most delicious to taste. I mainly prefer to buy Meghna river's ilish. I used to buy these from Chandpur, a southern coastal district. After the ilish season is over, I keep some of them frozen for the rest of the year, but the taste reduces with time."

Ilish doesn't take long to cook, but it requires careful attention. "You must pay attention the whole time. Even after cooking, one can understand how much care you have given to it," says Shabnam. Her advice is, the fewer spices you add, the tastier it will be. The main ingredients are onion, green pepper, salt, mustard,



turmeric, oil and water. Cumin is optional.

The process of cooking ilish is simple. First, you have to fry the fish lightly. Then pour oil in the pan and lightly fry the onions in it. Then, mix salt, turmeric, green pepper and water, and, cover for a while. After that, add the mustard paste and stir it for a moment. Then put the fish on it, add some water and cover it. After three to four minutes, the desired mustard ilish is ready.

Shabnam has lots of memories of her favourite ilish fish. Once, during her childhood, she ate the entire fish, meant for everyone in the family! "It was so delicious; I couldn't stop myself! If there were more, I would have eaten them too!" she says gleefully.

Every household has their own unique take on the ilish, and each one has its own unique taste and story to go with it.

By Shafiqul Islam

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