



Servings 4

Prep Time 20 min

Cooking Time 20 min

Fried Smelt with Vietnamese Chili - Garlic Sauce



Ingredients

1-pound bag of frozen smelt

Vegetable oil for frying

½ cup of yellow cornmeal

½ teaspoon of fine sea salt

½ teaspoon of garlic powder

½ teaspoon of Hungarian paprika

4 cloves of garlic

2 teaspoons of white sugar

1 tablespoon of fish sauce

1 or 2 Thai (bird's eye) chilis, or 1
tablespoon of Sambal Oelek ground chili
paste

½ cup of water

Juice of half or a whole lime

Directions

Step 1

Pour frozen smelt into a colander and thaw by running cold water over it. Allow to drip dry—it doesn't have to be completely thawed before cooking. Set aside.

Step 2

To make the cornmeal breading, combine cornmeal, sea salt, garlic powder, and paprika in a dish or wide, shallow bowl.

Step 3

To make the Vietnamese chili-garlic sauce, place fresh garlic, sugar and roughly chopped Thai chili(s) into a mortar and pestle—hold the chili if you're using the Sambal Oelek paste instead, and then pound until everything turns into a paste. (If you don't have a mortar and pestle, chop ingredients finely on a cutting board. Wash your hands after handling chilis.)

Step 4

Transfer the garlic-chili paste into a bowl and mix with fish sauce, water and lime juice (and Sambal Oelek chili paste if you're using that instead of the Thai chilis). There should be a good balance between salty, spicy and sour— if necessary, season again to taste.

Step 5

Heat oil to 375 degrees Fahrenheit in a medium saucepan. Remove ice crystals, if any, on the smelt. Shake of excess moisture and lightly coat with the cornmeal breading. Carefully drop fish into the hot oil and fry until crispy and golden—about 3-5 minutes. Cook in batches to avoid overcrowding the pan, which will cause the oil temperature drop too much.

Drain fish on paper towels and keep warm while you fry up the rest of the smelt.

Serve immediately with the Vietnamese dipping sauce on the side; give the sauce a good stir before serving.

