

## **Fish stew**

*for 4 people with some leftovers for pasta sauce*

12 calamari  
16 mussels  
1 cup basil leaves  
2 garlic cloves  
14 ounces can of peeled tomatoes  
salt to taste  
3 tablespoons olive oil + more for finishing  
red pepper flakes to taste  
1 pound black cod (or other white fish you like-true cod, tilapia, sea bass)  
4 1" thick country bread slices for serving  
8 head-on large gulf shrimps (note that head on is ideal, if you can't find them headless will do)

Clean the calamari as follows: separate the bodies from the tentacles. Turn the tentacles upside down and squeeze out the beak. Turn over and snip off the eyes and brain. Stick your index finger in the calamari body and find the bone, it feels like a hard cellophane stick. Pinch it free and pull it out in its entirety, it should be the length of the body. Squeeze out the guts.

**Note:** You can buy clean calamari, but cleaning your own is quite satisfying.

Check the mussels. If any are open tap them on the counter, if the two valves shut together you can use them, but please discard any that remain open. Sometimes mussels have a little beard that needs to be removed by pulling down from the pointy tip of the shell toward its curved end.

Stack the basil leaves and roll them as if they were a joint. Using a sharp chef's knife slice them into very thin ribbons. Smash the garlic cloves with the side of your knife, remove the skin and leave whole. Pour the tomatoes into a bowl, fill the empty can with water and swirl it around to capture the left behind tomatoiness then pour into the bowl.

Season with a pinch of salt and smash by squeezing with your hands.

Place the mussels in a small sauté pan over high heat and cover. Within 2 to 3 minutes, they will open and release liquid. Remove the mussels with a slotted spoon being mindful to let the liquid that is still in the shells fall back down into the pan.

Bring the heat to medium low and add 3 tablespoons of olive oil, garlic, half the basil and a pinch of red pepper flakes to the pan. When the oil is heated and you can smell the garlic without bending over the stove, remove the garlic and add the tomatoes. Stir and let simmer for about 10 minutes, taste to adjust salt as needed.

Delicately lower the cod into the tomato mixture skin side down. Time it to cook 8 to 10 minutes in a gentle but visible simmer. You will see the sides shirking and the flesh turn to a more pronounced shade of white.

While the cod is cooking, toast the bread slices until slightly crunchy on top but still with a soft heart. Rub them lightly with one of the garlic cloves you removed from the pan,

wrap them in a napkin to stay warm then place them on the table in a bread basket. Also, ready a trivet next to the bread basket.

Add the shrimp to the pan. As soon as you see them changing color on the sides flip them and add the calamari. Cover and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes. Remove the lid, add the mussels and turn off the flame.

Season with red pepper flakes to taste, finish with a circular thread of olive oil and scatter the remaining basil on top. Bring the pan to the table and place on the trivet. Instruct your guests to move a slice of bread from the basket into their bowl and top it with the soup.

There will be leftovers, mostly sauce, but hopefully some fish as well. You can use that for a pasta sauce as follows.

Fish the seafood out of the soup, flake the cod and slice the calamari. Shrimps and mussels can be left whole.

Place your pasta to cook in well salted, boiling water and time it for 3 minutes less than the suggested cooking time - spaghetti or linguine are best suited for this, but feel free to use other cuts you may already have.

While the pasta is cooking, pour the tomato in a sauté pan to heat and slightly thicken. Add the fish to the sauce for just the last couple of minutes to warm throughout.

Using a handheld strainer, remove the pasta from the pot and transfer to the pan. Toss over a high flame for 1 to 2 minutes. Finish with a thread of olive oil and serve immediately