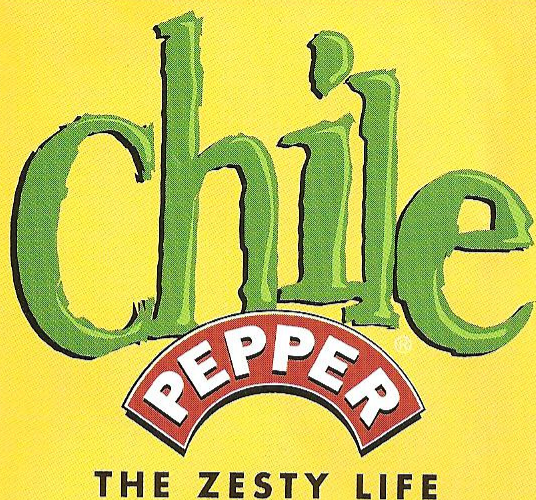


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CHILE PEPPER MARCH 2009

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Hot! Hot! Hot!

FRESH SEAFOOD IS A GREAT MATCH FOR HOMEMADE CARIBBEAN HOT SAUCE

BY ELIZABETH KARMEL

During my first visit to the Bahamas, in the theatre of the conch vendors at Arawak Cay in Nassau, I fell in love with chile peppers. Mesmerized, I stood and watched the swashbuckling action of a vendor who held a machete in his huge hands but somehow made the knife look small—like me holding a butter knife. He removed a live conch from its pink shell and, in the blink of an eye, diced the meat and added a bit of onion, green tomatoes, bell peppers and fiery fresh bird peppers. His movements were so fluid that it looked like hand ballet. A quick mix and a good dose of sour orange juice completed the ritual before he scooped it into a cup and handed it off. The whole process took mere minutes.

Although I consider myself an adventuresome eater, I had never eaten anything so fresh or prepared in such rustic conditions. At first I tasted a small bite of the raw conch salad (which is believed to be a very strong aphrodisiac). Then I dove in with relish, letting “my guy” add a little more bird pepper to the concoction. I was amazed at how hot the tiny peppers were, and they were the perfect condiment for bringing all the flavors together.

When I got back home, I couldn’t find fresh conch or fresh bird peppers but I had become so addicted to the bright flavors in the seafood salad that I created a Mock Conch Salad with Sour Orange Dressing. I added celery, a ripe tomato and fresh habanero to the traditional set of ingredients, and I substituted raw scallops and diced cooked shrimp for the fresh conch—but the spirit is the same.

In Nassau, conch salad was always for lunch or for snacking. Dinner was

reserved for my favorite local joint that specialized in grilled whole grouper. It too was fresh off the boat. The restaurant grilled it whole and brought it to the table. Even though this was not a fancy place—you could peek at bare feet under many a table—the staff elegantly filleted the fish tableside so diners wouldn’t have to worry about the bones. Thick chunks of steaming white fish flaked easily off the bone and onto our plates. A sprinkle of hot sauce or a squirt of lime was all that was needed to complement the fish’s flavors of smoke and sea. I couldn’t wait to adapt these clean flavors to my grill repertoire.

To make it extra special, I season my whole grilled fish at the table with my homemade dark rum-based Caribbean Hot Sauce. It may not be traditional, but it is hot and it is good!

Elizabeth Karmel is a nationally known grilling and barbecue expert and cookbook author. The native North Carolinian is also the creator of Girls at the Grill, a company that includes consulting, writing and designing her Grill Friends and Kitchen Friends line of outdoor cooking and kitchen tools (GirlsattheGrill.com). She is the executive chef of Hill Country, a Texas barbecue restaurant and live music venue in Manhattan (HillCountryny.com) and an instructor at New York’s Institute of Culinary Education.



Mock Conch Salad with Sour Orange Dressing

Yield: 4 to 6 servings • Zest Factor: Medium-Hot

Grilling Method: Direct/Medium-High Heat
This tropical salad brings me back to the stalls of Arawak Cay. This recipe is adapted from

Taming the Flame: Secrets for Hot-and-Quick Grilling and Low-and-Slow BBQ.

1 pound sea or bay scallops, chopped into 1/2-inch pieces
1 cup fresh lime juice, divided
2 pounds shrimp, shell-on
1/2 cup fresh orange juice
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
1/2 white onion, diced
2 green tomatoes, diced
1 very ripe tomato, diced
minced bird pepper or other chile, as needed
salt

In a bowl, combine scallops with 1/2 cup lime juice, and set aside. (If using small scallops, don’t chop them.) Cover, and refrigerate for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, grill the shrimp in the shells, and let cool. When cool, peel, and chop into 1/2-inch pieces.

Remove scallops from refrigerator, and drain. In a nonreactive bowl, combine scallops and shrimp. Mix well, and season with salt. Add remaining lime and orange juice, celery, onion and tomatoes, mixing gently after each addition. Taste for salt and citrus, adjusting if necessary. Add chile pepper to suit your taste, and serve.



Caribbean Hot Sauce

Yield: 2 cups • Zest Factor: Hot

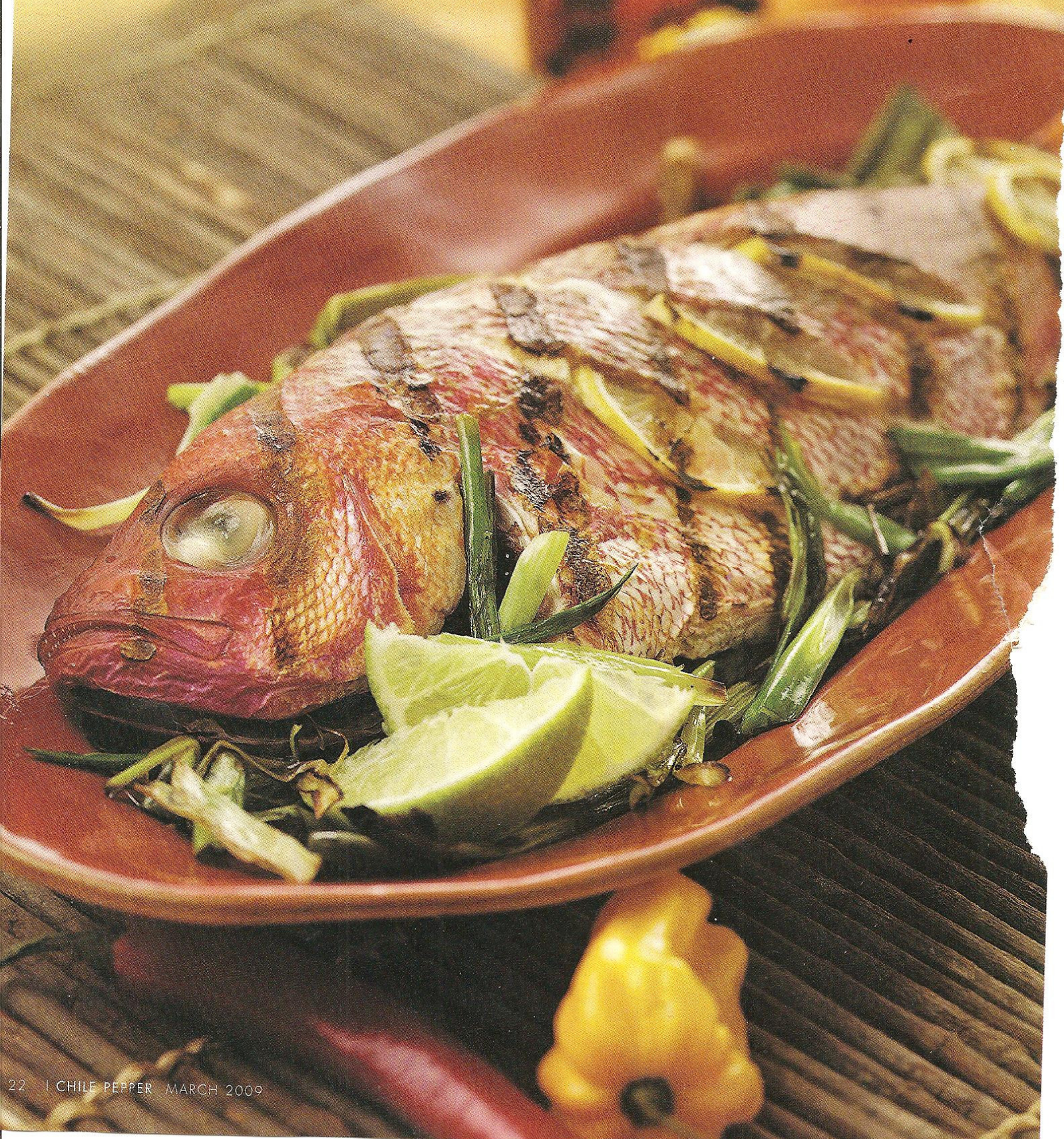
This homemade hot sauce has a subtle but definitely tropical splash of flavor. Bird peppers are also sold as Chinese Tien-Tsin peppers. Substitute Old New Orleans or another spiced rum. This recipe is adapted from the forthcoming Soaked, Slathered and Seasoned: A Complete Guide to Flavoring Food for the Grill and BBQ, John Wiley & Sons, April 2009.

Continued on page 23

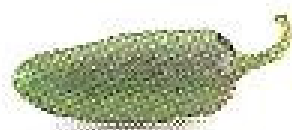
*Mock Conch Salad
with Sour Orange Dressing*



*Bahamian-Style
Whole Grilled Fish*



keep indefinitely at room temperature.



Bahamian-Style Whole Grilled Fish

Yield: 4 servings • Zest Factor: Medium

Grilling Method: Indirect/Medium Heat

This recipe is adapted from Taming the Flame: Secrets for Hot-and-Quick Grilling and Low-and-Slow BBQ.

1 teaspoon red chile flakes

1/4 cup olive oil

1 to 2 (2 pounds total) whole fish
such as red snapper, cleaned

2 cloves garlic, sliced thinly

2 lemons, sliced in rounds

1 bunch fresh chives or scallions

salt and freshly ground pepper

lemon wedges