Traeger Salmon

Make-ahead · Serves a crowd · Serves 6–8 (3 lb fillet)

Ken's note: TBD

A 3-pound skinless salmon fillet smoked low on the Traeger with a dry-brine rub, then glazed and finished hotter for a lightly crisp, medium-rare result. Choose the glaze: a kid-friendly base, with an optional Irish whiskey layer or a little heat.

Ingredients

Dry-brine rub

- 3 Tbsp kosher salt (1½ Tbsp if skipping the dry brine)
- ¼ cup dark brown sugar
- 2 tsp coarse black pepper
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 tsp dried dill or thyme

Base glaze

- ¼ cup honey or maple syrup
- 3 Tbsp soy sauce (or 2 Tbsp soy and 1 Tbsp water for less salt)
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp lemon zest
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard

Optional add-ins

- Whiskey: 3–4 Tbsp Irish whiskey, simmered 1–2 minutes in the saucepan before the other glaze ingredients
- Heat: ¼ tsp red pepper flakes or sriracha, stirred in at the end (or serve hot sauce at the table)

Fish

- 1 skinless salmon fillet, about 3 lb
- ½ cup blackberry preserves
- 3 Tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- Pinch of salt
- 1–2 Tbsp water, to thin
- ½ tsp fresh thyme leaves (optional)
- Fresh blackberries and lemon wedges, to serve

Method

1. Pat the salmon very dry. Mix the rub and sprinkle it over the flesh side, thorough but not caked on. Set the fish on a rack over a tray, uncovered, and refrigerate 45–90 minutes (up to 2 hours). Blot any surface moisture; don't rinse.
2. Heat the Traeger to 275°F with a hardwood blend (maple, hickory, or cherry). Set the salmon on lightly oiled foil or an oiled grate, tucking in any thin tail. Close the lid and cook until the thickest part reaches 115°F, usually 25–35 minutes; start checking at 20.
3. While it cooks, simmer the glaze ingredients (whiskey first, if using) in a small saucepan over medium heat 2–3 minutes, until it coats a spoon.
4. At 115°F, brush on a generous layer of glaze. For a lightly crisp finish, raise the Traeger to 325–350°F and cook another 5–10 minutes, until 120–125°F for medium-rare (up to 130°F for medium). Or leave it at 275°F for 5–8 minutes for a softer finish. Rest 5–10 minutes. Drizzle on any remaining glaze and serve with lemon wedges and herbs.
5. For 1½ lb, halve the rub and glaze and cook 20–30 minutes to 115°F. For 4–5 lb, use 1½ times the rub and glaze. Thinner tail pieces cook faster for guests who like it more done.

Variation: Blackberry-Balsamic Glaze (low and slow)

1. A fruitier, simpler version for a 2–3 lb skinless fillet (serves 4–6). Skip the rub; season with 1–1½ tsp kosher salt and ½ tsp black pepper and brush with 1–2 Tbsp olive oil.

2. Heat the Traeger to 180–200°F (use Super Smoke if you have it). Simmer the preserves, vinegar, Dijon, garlic, salt, and thyme in a small saucepan 3–5 minutes, thinning with water until brushable. Taste and add balsamic for tang or preserves for sweetness.
3. Set the salmon directly on the grates with a probe in the thickest part and smoke until 115–120°F, roughly 45–75 minutes. Brush on a thin layer of glaze, then one or two more light coats, until it reaches 125–130°F. Spoon a last coat of glaze over it and serve with lemon and blackberries.