

# Melanie Brown, an Alaskan Fisher, Shares Her Best Tips for Shopping for Sustainable Salmon

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Plus, get her cooking tips and advice on how to make your salmon stretch farther.



By [Bridget Shirvell](#) September 07, 2021



Credit: Courtesy of Melanie Brown

When we want to prepare a meal that's easy, elegant, and healthy, we often reach for salmon. Packed full of nutrients and delicious whether steamed, smoked, grilled, baked, and poached (or even raw, in the form of sushi), salmon is endlessly adaptable and always delicious. When our test kitchen develops recipes for this fish, they always look for wild Alaskan salmon. Why is it this so important? It's very sustainable and the quality can't be beat. Here, [fisher Melanie Brown](#) explains why buying Alaskan salmon is the most eco-friendly option and why buying whole salmon is the most cost-effective option.

"I might be a bit biased but for those seeking delicious, sustainably caught seafood it's impossible to beat Alaska," says Brown. Her opinion is worth trusting, as she knows salmon. She comes from a long line of commercial salmon fishers, starting with her great grandfather Paul Chukan. Brown began fishing with her family when she was 10-years-old. Today, she fishes at the same site her grandfather established with her children. Though it can sometimes be hard to find Alaskan salmon in the supermarket, many grocery stores do carry it. Should you find it's not readily available near you, go online instead; many retailers will ship it straight to you. Either way, it's worth seeking out—not only for the taste and nutrition, but also for the environmental impacts.

All Alaskan salmon is wild, with the fisheries throughout the state managed sustainability. In fact, sustainable fishing was written into Alaska's constitution in 1959. Each year, the state sets the allowable catch to ensure a healthy population of salmon in Alaska's water. Wild salmon are an essential part of healthy waterways and buying wild salmon actually helps protect the wild salmon population because it creates demand. The seafood industry is a vital part of the state's economy, including many multi-generational family fishing businesses. "For consumers looking to shop responsibly, simply Ask for Alaska," says Brown, adding that it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the different species of Alaska salmon: Chinook/king, sockeye, coho, keta, and pink, as each has unique characteristics and flavor profiles.

During salmon season, Brown and her crew are on the water every day, checking their lines to clear the fish that have been caught, then delivering them to be weighed and processed. In the off-season, Brown tracks what's happening with the fisheries management so she knows not only where the fisheries stand, but also what efforts need to be taken to continue ensuring the future of small boat fishermen. She worries that if too much deference is given to large-scale industrial catcher-processor boats, it will ultimately harm small boat fishers and coastal communities. "The fishermen I know love fishing as much as I do, and as fishermen we have to be innovative and adaptive problem solvers. It is these kinds of minds and thinking that can lead to the solutions that we need to find to ensure that our fisheries will continue to support our families far into the future."

Like many small boat fishers, Brown uses every part of the salmon when cooking at home and encourages consumers to do the same. "If you are able to access a whole fish as a consumer, the possibilities of what you are able to do with that fish are endless," says Brown. "With whole fish you can make fish stock or hearty soup if you break down the head and boil it along with the backbone. And if you scrape the meat off of the rib bones and backbone you can make really good fish patties. Full utilization of your salmon is a beautiful practice in honoring the life of the fish and not wasting what you have been gifted by nature."

If you're working with a whole salmon, Brown suggests canning the salmon with the bones in and the skin on as it'll be both more nutritious and more flavorful. "Be sure to eat the bones because they get soft from the canning process and are a great source of calcium," says Brown. She likes to make gravlax to preserve Alaska salmon both for its ease and the few

ingredients it requires. "The hardest part about it is finding space in your fridge for the curing process which takes about three days," says Brown, adding that other fun ways to preserve salmon are to pickle it, enjoying it on crackers or dark bread with sour cream or mayo, pressure cooking it, or smoking it. "Smoking fish is the ultimate form of preserving salmon and can be done with a small smoker at home and is based on Indigenous traditions of preserving salmon for the winter."

If you can't find a whole fish to break down at home, Brown loves salmon tacos as a way to give a lot of people a little taste of salmon. She says her favorite way to eat any leftover salmon is in a sandwich with mayo and sweet relish but also suggests adding leftover salmon to stir-fried rice. "Just remember that all fish cooks quickly, so if you are making a one-pot meal, be sure to add your salmon to the pot last," says Brown.