

## Bluefin Tuna . . . Prized and Endangered

**W**henever there is an opportunity to procure some freshly caught Bluefin tuna, I queue up! However, this time I may have queued too far!

Upon learning that the Bluefin season was open in Maine, and after receiving an email from my favorite fishmongers operating their business out of Portland Maine, I placed an order via their website. I didn't pay close attention and ordered twice as much as I would normally order for a household of two.

Now what?

What to do with two pounds of pristine Bluefin tuna loin? Find as many ways to prepare and enjoy it as I can, and that is what we are to explore with this post.

First a quick look at the Bluefin tuna.



*Atlantic bluefin tuna filet*

For those who ocean fish, as well as those who enjoy preparing and dining on Bluefin tuna, and the other species in the tuna hierarchy, here are a few of the observations I have made over the years.

Bluefin tuna is the gold standard of the species, with the Atlantic generally being the largest. It is rich, fatty, expensive, and best enjoyed raw as it is used to prepare sashimi, sushi, or crudo dishes. It certainly can be quickly pan seared over a high temperature, which allows the center to remain as close to raw as possible.

“ In the Pacific regions fishing for Bluefin is mostly year round with the peak time frame being June to October. ”

The other species types, namely Bigeye, Yellowfin (Ahi), Albacore, and Skipjack are listed here in the order of how best to prepare and enjoy them. For example, the Bigeye works well for sushi and pan searing; Yellowfin (Ahi) for poke, pan searing, grilling; Albacore primarily for canning and also grilling; and Skipjack for canning and other cooked dishes, not eaten raw.

I think you get the idea but we're talking about Bluefin here so let's concentrate on that.

Once again, for those who ocean fish, as well as those of us who source freshly caught Bluefin tuna, it is helpful to know that the season varies between Atlantic and Pacific fishing grounds, with the range falling from May through October.

More specifically, prime fishing in the Atlantic is June through November with the peak months being August and October. These dates may vary within specific Atlantic fishing grounds since quotas and schedules are established in an effort to manage the sustainability of the species.

In the Pacific regions fishing for Bluefin is mostly year round with the peak time frame being June to October.

One final note about handling freshly caught tuna: since having over ordered there was no way we could consume two pounds of Bluefin tuna in one meal, so my approach was to portion the large loin cuts and freeze them.

The following are a few helpful steps I keep in mind when freezing fresh sushi-grade Bluefin tuna, allowing for it to be safely eaten without diminishing the quality, flavor, or texture.

Wrap the tuna in wax or freezer paper, tightly seal with clear film, then place in a freezer-type sealable bag.

Place the wrapped tuna in a box or deep freezer where a constantly cold temperature will be maintained.

Always thaw the tuna on a plate or sheet pan in the refrigerator for 24 hours, still tightly wrapped. Do not thaw and refreeze!

When thawed, unwrap the tuna and pat dry with paper towels to remove any excess moisture. Keep it cold if not using straightaway, and use the tuna in 6 to 12 hours after thawing for then best texture and taste.

Proceed with whatever preparation you are using, and if it's sashimi-grade tuna, it can be eaten raw after freezing.

With that as our introduction, how about we enjoy some freshly caught Atlantic Bluefin tuna from the waters off the coast of Maine?

The following are the recipes I prepared from my tuna catch:

- Traditional-style tuna tartare
- Puttanesca-style tuna tartare
- Fresh pasta with raw tuna and fresh herbs
- Pan-seared, spice-coated tuna filets

Here is how I put it all together.

## **Bluefin Tuna Tartare**

1/2 pound sashimi-grade fresh Bluefin tuna, 1/4-inch dice

1 small shallot, finely minced

1 teaspoon chives, finely chopped

1 teaspoon capers, rinsed, dried, and finely chopped

1 knob of fresh ginger, peeled and finely grated

### *Dressing*

2 teaspoons olive oil

1 teaspoon white balsamic vinegar

Juice of 1/2 lemon

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Sea salt and pepper or Shichimi Togarashi (Japanese 7 Spice) to your taste

### *Garnish/To Finish*

Thinly sliced cucumber rounds to be used as a base

Pinch of lightly toasted sesame seeds

Tangle of micro greens on top (optional)

Lightly oiled and toasted baguette slices

### **Method**

Cut the tuna into uniform 1/4-inch diced cubes. Place in a glass or stainless bowl, keeping it chilled.

Note: The tuna filet can be placed in the freezer for no more than 10 minutes so that it firms up for easier slicing.

Prepare the shallot, chives, capers, and ginger as described above and fold together with the diced tuna, again keeping chilled until ready to plate.

Whisk the dressing ingredients together until a smooth emulsion is formed, set aside.

Slice the cucumber into thin rounds using a mandoline or a very sharp knife, set aside.

Lightly toast the sesame seeds in a dry pan over medium-high temperature, careful not to burn, set aside.

Lightly oil the sliced baguette and toast in the oven or on a grill pan on the stovetop, set aside.

Using chilled plates, arrange the sliced cucumbers in a circle in the center of each plate.

Drizzle a tablespoon or two of the dressing over the tuna mix in the bowl and toss to uniformly coat. Check and adjust the seasoning to your taste.

Spoon the dressed tuna on top of the cucumber circle and lightly drizzle with more dressing if you like.

Sprinkle with the toasted sesame seeds and top with the tangle of micro-greens if using.

Serve with the toasted baguette slices and perhaps a glass of Champagne or a chilled rosé.



*Bluefin tuna tartare*



This next recipe was an inspiration to me after reading several recipes that were assembled using the classic, savory Italian pasta sauce Puttanesca. As I understand the folklore, this sauce originated in Naples and enjoyed in other parts of southern Italy.

The name Puttanesca is derived from *puttana*, which in Italian means prostitute. As the story evolved, the working girls were able to put this sauce together quickly to have a meal between “shifts” or at the end of late nights. Ideally, the sauce is for cooks needing a fast-to-assemble and flavorful dish mainly using pantry staples.

In the classic interpretation of Puttanesca sauce the ingredients would generally be some measure of olive oil, garlic, tomatoes, anchovy, olives, capers, red chili flakes, fresh parsley and oregano. Rustic, salty, garlicky, briny, with a bit of spice. A lively and savory sauce to toss with your favorite pasta and wake up your taste buds. But what does Puttanesca have to do with Bluefin tuna you might ask?

One of those inspirational recipes I noted was an interpretation of a classic beef tartare flavored alla Puttanesca. Since we don't eat beef in our home, why not tuna? A perfect substitute for beef the way I view it. Also, since this is a raw preparation, fresh cherry tomatoes were substituted for the canned variety typically used in the preparation of the Puttanesca sauce.

Here is how I put my interpretation together.

## **Bluefin Tuna Tartare Puttanesca-Style**

### **Ingredients**

1/2 pound sashimi-grade fresh Bluefin tuna, 1/4-inch dice

10 to 12 small cherry tomatoes, halved or quartered

2 tablespoons finely diced red onion

1 large garlic clove, finely grated

1 teaspoon capers, rinsed, dried, and finely chopped

1 tablespoon finely minced anchovy

2 tablespoons chopped oil-cured black olives

Grated zest of 1 small lemon

1 teaspoon white balsamic vinegar

2 teaspoons finely sliced parsley and mint leaves

Sea salt, pepper, and red chili flakes to your taste

Olive oil

Lightly oiled and toasted baguette slices

### **Method**

Cut the tuna into uniform 1/4-inch dice cubes. Place in a glass or stainless bowl, keeping it chilled.

Note: the tuna filet can be placed in the freezer for no more than 10 minutes so that it firms up for easier slicing.

Slice the tomatoes as noted and add them to the bowl with the tuna.

Add the next 6 ingredients to the bowl and gently fold and mix together, careful not to break up the tomatoes.

Drizzle with a little olive oil to moisten along with adding the vinegar, parsley, mint, and seasoning.

Gently fold the ingredients together again and adjust the seasoning to your taste,

Place the tartare on chilled plates, drizzle with just a little more olive oil and serve straightaway with the toasted baguette slices on the side.



*Bluefin tuna tartare Puttanesca-stye*



The third dish is a bonus dish not listed in the introduction line-up, but since we are working with a Puttanesca recipe, why not take the Bluefin tuna tartare recipe that was just featured, make a few minor adjustments, and combine it with one of your favorite pasta shapes—either freshly made or one of the many boxed varieties?

Note: There are a few minor changes in the ingredients list and assembly to repurpose the tartare Puttanesca into a pasta sauce.

## **Bluefin Tuna and Pasta Puttanesca-Style**

### **Ingredients**

1/4 pound pasta of your choice per person

1/2 pound sashimi-grade fresh Bluefin tuna, 1/2-inch cubes

2 garlic cloves, finely diced

1/2 red onion finely diced  
1 tablespoon finely minced anchovy  
14-oz can chopped Italian tomatoes  
1 teaspoon capers, rinsed, dried, and finely chopped  
2 tablespoons chopped oil-cured black olives  
2 teaspoons each finely chopped parsley and oregano leaves  
Sea salt, pepper, and red chili flakes to your taste  
Olive oil  
Lightly toasted breadcrumbs, to finish

### Method

Cut the tuna into uniform 1/2-inch dice cubes. Place in a glass or stainless bowl, drizzle with a little olive oil, keeping it moist.

Note: The tuna filet can be placed in the freezer for no more than 10 minutes so that it firms up for easier slicing.

Place a large stockpot or wide and deep sauté pan over medium-high temperature and warm 3 to 4 tablespoons of olive oil until hot but not smoking.

Sauté the garlic and the onion, stirring to coat with the oil, until the garlic is fragrant and the onions have begun to soften.

Add the anchovy to the sauté and stir until the anchovy dissolves into the mix.

Pour in the tomatoes, capers, and the olives, stirring to thoroughly combine, then season with the sea salt, pepper, and chili flakes to your taste. Reduce to a gentle simmer.

Meanwhile, boil a pot of salted water to cook the pasta. If you are using fresh pasta, you will need to work fast since fresh generally only takes 2 minutes to cook. If you are using a boxed pasta, follow the package instructions.

Once the pasta is ready, add it to the sauce along with the tuna and a tablespoon or two of the pasta cooking water. Scatter the chopped herbs over and around, gently toss everything together, allowing the tuna to cook for just a minute or two in the heat of the pasta and sauce.

Divide the pasta between serving plates, sprinkle with some of the toasted bread crumbs and serve straightaway.



Next up is a recipe for fresh pasta with raw Bluefin tuna and fresh herbs. Here is how I put it together.

# Tagliatelle with Bluefin Tuna and Fresh Herbs

## Ingredients

1/4 pound pasta of your choice per person (I prepared fresh tagliatelle although any long pasta, either fresh made or boxed would work here)

1/2 pound sashimi-grade fresh Bluefin tuna, cut into 1/2-inch slices

1/2 red onion finely diced

6 tablespoons chopped fresh mint and oregano (or marjoram) leaves

Zest from 1 small lemon

Sea salt, pepper, and red chili flakes to your taste

## Method

Cut the tuna into uniform 1/2-inch slices. Place in a glass or stainless bowl, drizzle with 2 to 3 tablespoons of olive oil, and toss with the fresh herbs. Set aside.

Note: The tuna filet can be placed in the freezer for no more than 10 minutes so that it firms up for easier slicing.

Place a large stockpot of salted water on the stovetop and bring it to a boil. If you are using fresh pasta, you will need to work fast since fresh generally only takes 2 minutes to cook. If you are using a boxed pasta, follow the package instructions.

While the pasta is cooking, heat 2 to 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large sauté pan placed over medium-high temperature. Once the oil is hot, but not smoking, quickly sauté the onion until it is translucent, approximately 2 minutes.

Add the cooked pasta along with 1/3 cup of the pasta cooking water. Simmer for a minute or two, stirring the pasta until the sauce emulsifies.

Finally, add the tuna with the herb mix as well as the lemon zest, tossing gently, allowing the tuna to warm with the temperature of the cooked pasta and the sauce. The tuna should be just lightly cooked and the sauce fragrant with the herbs and the lemon zest. If the sauce seems a little too dry, add a tablespoon to two of the hot pasta cooking water to thin it.

Season with sea salt, pepper, and chili flakes to your taste and plate the dish to serve.



*Tagliatelle with bluefin tuna and fresh herbs*



The last dish I am sharing is one I often make when fresh tuna is on hand. Some sushi/sashimi purists might not favor cooking ultra-fresh sashimi-grade Bluefin tuna, but in this case the cooking technique of a quick pan sear leaves the tuna filet very rare/raw in the center and surrounded by a thin, blackened crust. The following is the way I generally prepare this dish.

## **Pan-Seared, Spice-Coated Bluefin Tuna Filets**

### **Ingredients**

1/2 pound sashimi-grade fresh Bluefin tuna, cut in half lengthwise

Spice mix of your choosing (house-made Old Bay spice mix was used), or simply use sea salt and pepper

Olive oil

### **Method**

If you are using a ground spice mix, very lightly coat the tuna filets with olive oil and roll them in the spice mix to cover all surfaces. This is easily done by spreading several tablespoons of the spice mix on a sheet pan and rolling the filets until they are coated.



*Spice-coated filets*

Heat 2 to 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high temperature. When the oil is sufficiently hot but not quite smoking, place the filets in the pan.

Using tongs and working rapidly sear the filets on all sides until a uniform char/crust is achieved, no more than 1 to 2 minutes per side.



*Pan-seared filets*

Removed the seared filets to a platter to rest for a minute before slicing.

Using a very sharp knife, slice the filets into 4 to 5 uniform pieces, revealing the rich, dark red flesh in the center.

Arrange the seared filets on a serving plate with a side vegetable or accompaniment of your choice as there are many options.



*Pan-seared filets*

When plating this dish I place the cut pieces on top of a mixed root slaw, but I'll leave you to decide what to choose as an accompaniment.



For those who might be interested in preparing a batch of my Old Bay spice mix, the recipe is as follows:

# House-Made Old Bay Spice Mix

## Ingredients

1 tablespoon of bay leaf - fennel seed - rosemary needle powder

(This ingredient is made by placing equal amounts of bay, fennel, and rosemary in a spice grinder and processing it into a powder).

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon dry mustard

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 teaspoon pimentón

2 teaspoons celery seeds, ground

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg powder

1/2 teaspoon ginger powder

1/4 teaspoon each of powdered clove, cardamom, all spice, and red chili flakes

## Method

Mix all of the prepared ingredients together and store in a glass jar for future use.

Well now it's your turn! If you are lucky enough to source some ultra-fresh sashimi-grade Bluefin tuna then of course use that. However, if Bluefin is not available, either Bigeye or Ahi would be your next best choices for any of the recipes featured.

Give at least one of these recipes a try, or if you're feeling ambitious, perhaps all of them before the tuna fishing season ends.

Whatever you decide to do, enjoy it.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. M.', written in a cursive style.

Eat well • Drink well • Be welll

*Eat first, judge later!*