

Breco Seafood Braai Competition

Cape Coast Braai Calamari Salad

By Bevan Oliver



Seafood: Calamari

Serves: 4

Preparation time: 20 min

Cooking time: 25 min

The story

I was inspired by coastal South African fire-cooking, this dish my balances advanced techniques with a rustic tradition. The calamari was delicately poached in lemon and bay leaves and thyme water with peppercorns and sea salt for a depth of flavor and ultimate tenderness before I flash braaied it alongside sweet strawberries, unlocking a deeply caramelized, smoky complexity. Paired with spinach, charred capsicums, briny olives, and rich feta, this vibrant creation delivers a perfectly balanced, award-winning flavor profile.

Ingredients

350 g Calamari Strips

180 g Spinach

2 Capsicum Red and Yellow

10 Strawberries

100g Olives

85 g Feta cheese

1 White Onion

4 Bay leaves

3 Lemons

4 Sprigs of Fresh Thyme

15 g Black Peppercorns

8 g Sea Salt

Green herb purée ingredients

125 ml vegetable oil

30 ml olive oil

100 ml apple cider vinegar

20 ml crushed garlic

10 ml mild mustard

60 ml chopped fresh herbs (parsley, oregano, fennel, dill)

20ml water

Method

Step 1:

Prep The Green Herb Purée. Make the purée first so it is ready for plating.

Blend the purée Base, combine the 125 ml vegetable oil, 30 ml olive oil, 100 ml apple cider vinegar, 20 ml crushed garlic, 10 ml mild mustard, 60 ml chopped fresh herbs, and 20 ml water.

Emulsify & Season: Blend on high speed until completely smooth, vibrant green, and slightly thickened. Season with a small pinch of sea salt. Set aside in a small serving bowl or squeeze bottle.

Prep the Veg & Fruit:

Slice the red and yellow capsicums and the white onion into thin strips. Slice the 100g olives into halves or rings. Wash the 180g spinach and pat it completely dry and blanch it for 5min. Cut the 10 strawberries in halves with the green tops on (this keeps them stable on the braai grid).

Step 2:

The aromatic calamari poach: This ensures the calamari stays exceptionally tender before it hits the dry heat of the fire.

Build the poaching liquid: Fill a medium pot with enough water to submerge the calamari. Add the 4 bay leaves, 15g black peppercorns, 4 sprigs of fresh thyme, 8g sea salt, and the juice of 1 lemon.

Bring to a rolling boil.

Delicate poach: Drop the 350g calamari strips into the boiling water. Reduce heat immediately to a gentle simmer. Poach for exactly 60 to 90 seconds.

Ice bath & dry: Immediately remove the calamari with a slotted spoon and plunge it into ice water to stop the cooking. Once cooled, pat the calamari completely dry with paper towels.

Crucial: If the calamari is wet, it will steam instead of charring on the braai. Toss the dry strips in a tiny drizzle of olive oil.

Step 3:

The braai: Ensure your coals are at a medium-high heat. You want quick color without overcooking.

Char the aromatics: Place the onion slices and capsicum strips onto the braai grid.

Grill until they have beautiful black char marks and soften slightly. Remove and slice into bite-sized strips.

Caramelize the Strawberries: Place the strawberries on a medium-low heat section of the

braai (or use a skewer). Grill for about 1 to 2 minutes per side just until they sweat, blister, and release their natural sugars. Remove, cut off the green tops, Flash-braai the calamari: Place the poached calamari strips directly over the hottest part of the coals. Grill for only 30 to 45 seconds per side to catch a smoky flame char. Remove immediately.

Step 4:

Plating Style: Execution

Assemble immediately while the braaied ingredients are warm.

The Green Bed: Lay your spinach in a neat, sweeping diagonal strip across the center of each plate.

The Layering: Artfully arrange the warm braaied calamari strips, smoky capsicums, and grilled onions along the spinach bed.

The Jewels: Scatter the sliced olives and the caramelized braaied strawberry quarters evenly across the top. Crumble the 85g feta cheese gently over the entire arrangement.

The Finish: Spoon or drizzle your Green Herb Purée elegantly along the top side of the plate's white space. Squeeze the remaining 2 lemons over the salad right before serving for that final burst of fresh citrus acid.