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An Exploration of the Wonders of Black Caviar by Jennette

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Variously referred to as sea jewels, black pearls, and the pearls of kings, caviar is redolent with image and experience.

Etymology of Caviar

Most people have such a strong association between caviar and Russia that it is commonly assumed that the word caviar must be of Russian derivation. In fact, the word caviar, while coming to English through French and Italian, is most probably rooted in Turkish or Persian from the words havya and khyah which mean â€˜eggâ€™.

Caviar is, after all, the roe or egg of an enormous fish, most often sturgeon. And while sturgeon are located and harvested for their eggs from several locations around the globe, Russianâ€™s landlocked

Caspian Sea has been the fishing ground for the most famous Beluga caviar. Beluga sturgeon noted for producing black caviar, once represented 40 percent of the sturgeon haul, but today barely makes up one percent of caviar on the market. The less polluted and less over-fished waters off the coast of Iran are more popular today for sturgeon fisherman and their black caviar-consuming clientele.

Types

A second common misperception is that black caviar is the only desirable variety.

Beluga caviar may be the most recognized type of black caviar, but there are several types of sturgeon which produce distinctive roe that appeal to a wide consumer audience. The Beluga known for producing black caviar are carnivorous, but Osetra and Sevruga sturgeon, omnivores, also produce popular caviar. Osetra sturgeon, in particular, is well known for the variety of their eggs in terms of size, color and even flavor. Osetra caviar evidences such variety because the Osetra sturgeon has a complex diet which includes algae, plants, small fish and tiny crustaceans. Osetra caviar, more than any other, has roe which directly reflects each individual sturgeonâ€™s diet. It is said that were a person to sample as many as 10 individual jars of Osetra caviar, there would be as many fragrances and flavors despite the fact that the sturgeon had been caught and processed at the same time and place.

Osetra Caviar

Osetra sturgeon lives an average of 60-80 years, though there are reports of the fish living over 100 years. The age of the sturgeon is important because as the fish ages, subtle changes occur in the eggâ€™s flavor and color. Osetra mature, meaning that the eggs are available for harvest, somewhere between 12-15 years in cold waters and between 8-10 years in warmer waters. Over the sturgeonâ€™s lifetime Osetra caviar fades from black caviar to amber colored caviar and it develops a mild nut flavor which some have compared to walnuts and cream.

How to serve

Whether you choose traditional Beluga black caviar or the subtlety of Osetra caviar, how you serve your caviar will greatly influence its enjoyment. Caviar ought to be kept in the coolest part of the refrigerator optimally at 36Â°-39Â° Fahrenheit. Approximately 15 minutes before serving Osetra caviar

or, in fact, any other type of caviar, allow the roe to sit at room temperature. This will allow the caviarâ€™s flavors to coalesce to their most delicious state. Placing the dish of caviar on a bed of crushed ice will prolong the heightened flavor.

How to eat

Maintaining optimal flavor is key to enjoying Osetra caviar, black caviar or any of the other delicious varieties a person may choose to serve. To do this, several rules for serving and eating caviar are prescribed. To begin with, connoisseurs say that caviar should never be served using silver service-ware which it is claimed will negatively affect the flavor. Instead, wood, horn, mother-of-pearl or gold utensils are recommended.

Secondly, true aficionados insist that the eggs be served alone without garnish or accompaniment. It is suggested that small amounts of the roe be allowed to burst on the tongue in order to deliver their delicate flavor. Some, who find the flavor (described as egg yolk, iodine and possibly hazelnut) overly intense may serve caviar on small toasts or Russian pancakes known as blinis, Concessionary garnishes include, lemon, onion, pepper, herbs or crÃ¨me fraiche.

Caviar Says Special

Special occasions are the perfect opportunity to explore the delicacy sometimes called the pearl of kings. Caviar vendors offer a wide variety of roe at a spectrum of price points to please any palate â€“ from the novice to the connoisseur. Eaten alone, with subtle accompaniments or as part of a trendy recipe, caviar can make any celebration memorable.

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