



Feast of the Seven Fishes: Washington-inspired recipe from Chef Mike Easton

by AAKANKSHA AGARWAL | December 17, 2024



The Feast of the Seven Fishes isn't just a meal; it's a marathon. An Italian-American tradition brought stateside by immigrants, it's a seafood extravaganza traditionally served on Christmas Eve. While its origins are rooted in abstinence (no meat, folks), today it's all about abundance.

"Italians were cooking the fish they had close at hand, pulling it right out of the Mediterranean," says Chef Mike Easton of [The Kitchen at Abeja](#). "That's very much how we cook here in the Pacific Northwest, so using local ingredients feels natural to the meal's origins."

And in the Pacific Northwest? We do it with a side of Dungeness crab and a whole lot of local flavor.

At the helm of this regional reinvention is James Beard-nominated Chef Mike Easton, who honed his skills in Tuscany and now crafts ingredient-driven dishes as the executive chef at The Kitchen at Abeja, a restaurant tucked within Walla Walla's idyllic [Abeja winery](#).

The restaurant is all about bringing both tradition and innovation to plates, anchored by local produce. When it comes to the Feast of the Seven Fishes, Easton is all about keeping true to its roots while embracing the Pacific Northwest's incredible bounty.

Feeling inspired to tackle this Italian tradition at home? Amazing. Prefer to skip the cooking? Join The Kitchen at Abeja for their seven-course Feast, served December 19–22 and 26–29. \$185 per person, [reservations required](#).



Dining Room at Abeja (Courtesy: Abeja)

But if you're inclined to roll up your sleeves and bring the Feast to life in your own kitchen, here's how Chef Mike Easton suggests you do it —complete with one of his signature recipes to get you started. Let's dive in!

"The Feast of the Seven Fishes isn't inherently Tuscan," Easton explains, "but the spirit of generosity and making every meal a celebration is something I carry into my cooking. My studies in Italy really taught me about ingredient-focused cooking, finding the very best local produce in its prime, and showcasing it simply and elegantly. I try to showcase that experience in all of my cooking."

This philosophy works particularly well with seafood and lets the fish be the true star of the dish. Overcomplicate things, and you're just hiding what makes it great. Keep it simple, let it shine, and voilà—ocean magic on a plate.

Feast Cheat Sheet

Here's the skinny: focus on quality seafood (Dungeness crab and wild salmon are your MVPs), keep it simple, and don't stress about hitting the magical number seven. "Sometimes, it's less about the number of dishes and more about who's around the table," Easton adds. Bonus points if there's a bottle of Washington wine within arm's reach.



'The Small Barn' where dinner is served. (Courtesy: Abeja)

Recipe Spotlight: Abeja Crab Cakes

These crab cakes showcase the best of the Pacific Northwest while staying true to the simplicity and elegance Easton admires from his time in Italy.

Ingredients:

- 500g Dungeness crabmeat
- 125 ml Greek yogurt
- 3 egg yolks
- 50g potato flakes
- 60 ml fresh chives, chopped
- 60 ml fresh parsley, chopped
- 15 ml lemon juice
- Zest of one lemon
- 1g cayenne pepper
- Salt, Q.B. (quanto basta, or “just enough”)

Directions:

In a small bowl, whisk together the yogurt, egg yolks, and lemon juice.

In a larger bowl, gently combine the crabmeat, chives, parsley, cayenne, lemon zest, and potato flakes.

Carefully fold in the yogurt mixture. Cover and chill for 30 minutes.

Shape into eight crab cakes.

Heat a nonstick pan over medium heat, add clarified butter, and cook the cakes until golden, about three minutes per side.

Serve these with a crisp Washington Chardonnay or a light Pinot Gris for a true holiday treat.

Bringing It Home

Whether you're roasting salmon with a hazelnut crust or whipping up cioppino with local clams, the Feast of the Seven Fishes: Pacific Northwest Style is all about celebrating the sea and the season. Or, as Chef Easton puts it, "A meal is about the people, the stories, and sharing a laugh over good food. Keep it fresh. Keep it fun."

