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**Colleen Walker**, president and co-owner of Catered Affare, is an award-winning Toronto caterer famous for her creative and crowd-pleasing recipes. She has planned events for blue-chip clients for 18 years. Colleen gave us a few of her tips for pulling off an organized event with style.

**Best party bartending:** “Make your drinks ahead and chill the mixture in a pitcher. You can even garnish your glasses ahead of time. Then when guests arrive, all you have to do is pour.”

**Smooth delivery:** “For summer entertaining, plan a menu of cold items except a barbecued entrée. The weather is too nice to spend your time indoors when you could be outside chatting with your guests.”

**Refreshing summer dessert:** “Fresh wild blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries topped with fresh whipped cream spiked with maple syrup and dusted with crumbled maple sugar.”

**Easy flavour enhancer:** “A squeeze of juice from fresh lemons or limes.” This adds a great tangy flavour to fish as well as fruits and vegetables.

**Tool she couldn't do without:** “Nine-inch stainless steel tongs. They're easy to use, and you don't burn yourself turning hot foods.” Use for both barbecue and oven cooking.

**Unusual ingredient to add to summer salads:** “Fresh mint. It creates another layer of aroma.”

**Most underused spice:** “Cumin lends an exotic taste even to basic dishes. Try adding a pinch to eggs.”

Secret to her catering success: “Clients want foods that are familiar and comfortable, but they also want to be wowed. It's about making the ordinary extraordinary.”

**Colleen Walker's Cedar-Plank Braided Salmon is guaranteed to amaze guests at your next party. The fish absorbs a smoky flavour when cooked atop cedar planks on the barbecue.**



## Cedar-Plank Braided Salmon with Apple Butter Sauce

Caterer and chef Colleen Walker throws spectacular parties for a living. Her Toronto-based company Catered Affare makes hundreds of these show-stopping braided salmon every year. The beautiful presentation will make it the pièce de résistance at any summer barbecue.

The salmon can either be grilled on the barbecue or baked in the oven. Purchase chemical-free cedar planks from the supermarket (if your salmon is large, you can butt two cedar planks together). You'll need a 16" length cedar for 3 to 4 lbs. of salmon filet.

Vegetable oil

One side of fresh Atlantic or Pacific salmon, 3 to 4 lbs., skin off and pin bones removed (your local fish market should do this at no charge)

½ cup dark or amber maple syrup

¼ cup Canadian rye whiskey or maple liqueur

Coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

½ cup maple butter (available at farmers' markets or maple syrup farms)

2 to 4 tbsp. granulated maple sugar (available at farmers' markets or maple sugar farms)

Fresh thyme or sage springs for garnish (optional)

1. Preheat barbecue to medium heat, or oven to 350°F. Some grilling advocates advise soaking the plank in water so it doesn't burn, but Colleen chooses not to soak the plank – she likes the smoky taste that the charring wood imparts to the salmon.
2. Oil the cedar plank and place the salmon on it. Keeping fish intact at narrower tail end, start cutting, about one inch in from the tail end, lengthwise through the middle section (where the backbone would have been) straight to the opposite end. Repeat this motion to cut a total of seven strips that are each about ½" to ¾" wide. Where the fish is intact at tail end, strips will be narrower.
3. Measure out half of the maple syrup and reserve. Combine remaining maple syrup with whiskey. Brush whiskey mixture all over salmon strips to generously coat. Season with salt and pepper.
4. To braid, mentally label the strips – starting from the left – as numbers one through seven. Starting with strip number four, lift it over strips one through three so that it is now on the outside left-hand side. Next, take strip number three and lift it over strips five through seven. Now start again, renumber the strips from one through seven; again lift (the new) strip number four to the far left and (the new) strip number three to the right. Continue in this manner until you have braided the whole length of fish. Pat the braided fish into one compact length (it should look something like the braided breads in bakeries). Either skewer the loose ends together or simply press together to keep in place. At this point, the salmon can be set on a baking sheet, covered and chilled overnight.
5. To finish the salmon, pour the maple butter and reserved syrup generously over the salmon, especially into nooks and crannies. Season with salt and pepper.
6. To barbecue the salmon, place the plank on the grill, on the upper rack, if your barbecue has one, over medium heat; close lid (or cover salmon with foil roasting pan). Cook for 20 to 25 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork, and internal temperature of the fishes reaches 130°F. Alternatively, to roast the salmon in the oven, place the plank on a foil-lined rimmed baking sheet and bake in a preheated 350°F oven for 30 to 35 minutes.
7. Remove plank from heat; dust salmon liberally with maple sugar. Salmon may be served hot or cold right from the plank. Garnish with fresh herbs, if using.

Serve with chilled Apple Butter Sauce (recipe below). Makes 8 to 10 servings.

### Apple butter sauce

1 cup mayonnaise

¼ cup apple butter

1 tsp. minced fresh tarragon, or ¼ tsp. dried

1. Blend the mayonnaise, apple butter & tarragon in a bowl & chill until serving time. Makes 1-¼ cups.