



MEDITERRANEAN · SICILIAN / SARDINIAN · STARTER · RAW · SUMMER  
GARDEN SERVICE · PALATE CLEANSER

# Watermelon · Bottarga · Pickled Rind

Three-centimeter batons of chilled black-skin watermelon from Homestead or Redland, dusted with the translucent shavings of aged bottarga (cured gray-mullet roe from Sardinia), finished with 72-hour pickled rind for acid and crunch, a whisper of Aleppo chile flakes, and flaky salt. Four ingredients, three-minute assembly, ninety-minute sourcing. The simplest dish in the book and the one that surprises guests the most — when watermelon is at peak in Miami July-September, this is the single best way to taste it.

Protein Bottarga di muggine (gray-mullet roe) · 30 g total for 4 portions

Serves 4 as starter · 120 g watermelon flesh + 7 g bottarga per portion

Difficulty Beginner-Intermediate (technique easy; ingredient peak timing crucial)

Active 20 min (plus 72 h passive rind pickle if making from scratch)

Total 20 min same-day (3 days ahead with rind pickle)

## THE STORY

### The Four-Ingredient Summer Rule

There is a rule in Italian summer cooking: when the watermelon is black-skin perfect and the bottarga comes from a Sardinian producer still doing it by hand, you do as little as possible. You do not add herbs. You do not add oil beyond a whisper. You do not construct a salad. You slice the watermelon into elegant batons, shave the bottarga

tissue-thin, hit it with heat (chile flakes) and acid (pickled rind), finish with Maldon, and get out of the way. The dish is a demonstration that two exceptional ingredients at peak are the recipe; everything else is decoration.

Bottarga di muggine is gray-mullet roe that has been salt-cured and air-dried for 4-6 months in the Sardinian tradition. The resulting block is firm, amber-colored, with a shaved-Parmesan-like texture and a deeply savory sea-salt-and-raisin flavor profile. Bottarga di tonno (tuna roe) is darker, more aggressive, and less commonly paired with fruit. Sardinian hand-cured muggine from small producers costs \$80-140 per 100 g; American commercial bottarga is half that and notably sharper. The gift of the Sardinian version is the precision — the roe is cured in a thin salt-and-air envelope that develops concentrated umami without the briny harshness of rush-cured product.

Watermelon gives its best when it is absolutely at peak — dense, not watery; crisp, not grainy; sweet, not one-note. South Florida July through September is the correct window for Miami sourcing. The black-skin heirloom varieties (Sugar Baby, Orangeglo, Moon & Stars — all available at Robert Is Here + Redland Farmers Market from late June) have denser flesh and better flavor than commercial Charleston Gray commercial watermelons. At a top Italian seaside restaurant, this dish is served only in peak season; during winter it is deliberately off the menu. Respect the seasonality or substitute with a different dish entirely.

The pickled rind is the dish's quiet gift. When you cut off the rind from your watermelon batons, you are left with clean white inner-rind flesh — the part most Americans throw away. This material takes to pickling beautifully: 72 hours in a brine of rice vinegar + sugar + salt + toasted mustard seed + black peppercorns produces crunchy-sweet-sour-aromatic matchsticks that add texture, acid, and zero-waste kitchen practice to the plate. Start them 3 days before the dinner party. Each time you serve watermelon-bottarga in peak season, you are also building a pantry for the next time.

# Specs

<p><b>YIELD</b></p> <p><b>4 as starter · 120 g flesh + 7 g bottarga + pickled rind per portion</b></p>	<p><b>WATERMELON</b></p> <p><b>Sugar Baby / Orangeglo / Moon &amp; Stars (Miami heirloom July- Sept)</b></p>	<p><b>BOTTARGA</b></p> <p><b>Bottarga di muggine (Sardinian, 4 - 6 mo cure)</b></p>	<p><b>PICKLED RIND</b></p> <p><b>7 2-hour fridge-pickle in rice vinegar + sugar + salt</b></p>
<p><b>DIFFICULTY</b></p> <p><b>Beginner- Intermediate</b></p> <p>●●○○○</p>	<p><b>ACTIVE TIME</b></p> <p><b>20 min same- day</b></p>	<p><b>COOK TIME</b></p> <p><b>Zero</b></p>	<p><b>MAKE-AHEAD</b></p> <p><b>Rind pickle 3 days · assembly à la minute · bottarga shaves tableside</b></p>
<p><b>CARDINAL RULE</b></p> <p><b>Season is everything. Off-peak = different dish entirely.</b></p>			

UMAMI ADAPTATION

## What Changed & Why

Watermelon-bottarga is a seasonality-first recipe. Without peak watermelon (Miami July-September), the dish drops from masterpiece to weak imitation — substitute with swordfish-ceviche-bottarga or hamachi-crudo instead. Ingredient substitutions when scaling up or substituting: for bottarga, aged hard parmigiano (Vacche Rosse 36-mo)

microplane-shaved is acceptable but losses 90% of the dish's distinctiveness — this is a bottarga-forward dish, not a salt-delivery vehicle. Pickled rind is the most flexible element: commercial Japanese pickled cucumber (Kyuri no Asazuke) or a fridge-fast 4-hour pickle works as a shortcut. Arbequina olive oil is optional; oil-free versions are valid. For extra-premium service, add micro-herbs (micro basil or shiso sprouts) in very small amounts — but resist the urge to turn this into a salad. The discipline IS the dish.

CHANGE	ORIGINAL	UMAMI VERSION	WHY
v 1 . 0	Classical Sardinian/Sicilian summer watermelon-bottarga plate	Full recipe with 72-h rind pickle workflow + Miami sourcing Robert Is Here + 3×3×8 cm baton geometry + tableside microplane service + peak-season discipline (Miami July-Sept only)	Closes UMAMI-2 at #7; teaches zero-waste (pickled rind) + ingredient-first philosophy + seasonality-as-gate

## INGREDIENTS

# What You Need

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### Everyday

#### **Everyday Tier — Miami-Local + Whole Foods**

- Peak-season watermelon — 1 small (2-3 kg) from Robert Is Here, Redland Farmers Market, or Whole Foods (July-Sept only; Publix Sugar Baby acceptable if noted variety)
- Bottarga di muggine — 30 g from Whole Foods Italian aisle or Market Hall Foods (Plantin Italian-direct brand or Flor di Sardegna) · ~\$35
- Rice vinegar — 200 ml (Kikkoman or Momi Market Mizkan)
- Granulated sugar — 80 g
- Kosher salt — 20 g
- Whole brown mustard seed — 1 tsp
- Whole black peppercorns — 1 tsp
- Fresh bay leaf — 1
- Aleppo chile flakes (pul biber) — 1/4 tsp from Whole Foods spice aisle or Kalustyan's
- Arbequina olive oil — 1 Tbsp for finishing drizzle
- Maldon sea salt — 1 tsp
- Lemon — 1/2 for zest (optional)

## No Limits

### No-Limits Tier — Sardinian-Direct and Summit

- Peak-season heirloom watermelon — Sugar Baby or Orangetlo or Moon & Stars variety from Robert Is Here (19200 SW 344th St Homestead, 45 min S of Miami) or Redland Organics CSA · 1 small 2-3 kg specimen · July-September peak only
- Bottarga di muggine Sardinian-direct — Plantin Flor di Sardegna or Don Giovanni Sardinian bottarga from Gustiamo NYC or Eataly Sardinia section · 50 g whole lobe, vacuum-sealed, ~\$85-110
- Alternate summit: Fresh-cured bottarga di muggine from a Sicilian specialty importer (Market Hall Foods 'Fresh' line when available) — 6-week cure for sharper sweetness
- Aged rice vinegar — Ito Jozo Junmai Komezu (90-day-barrel) from The Japanese Pantry · 250 ml
- Muscovado cane sugar (alternative) — for complexity in pickle brine · Wholly Natural Miami · 80 g
- Whole Tellicherry peppercorns — Burlap & Barrel single-origin · 1 tsp
- Yellow mustard seed + brown mustard seed mix — Kalustyan's · 1 tsp each
- Urfa Biber (Turkish smoked chile) — Burlap & Barrel · 1/4 tsp · alternative to Aleppo for smoky register
- Arbequina — Castillo de Canena DOP Reserva · 1 Tbsp drizzle
- Flaky finishing salt — Halen Môn or Maldon · 1 tsp
- Microplaneable lemon — Meyer lemon from Whole Foods specialty citrus · 1/2 fruit for optional zest

## EQUIPMENT

### Your Kit

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- Sharp chef's knife for watermelon batons

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- Microplane grater for bottarga shaving

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- Small saucepan + glass jar for 72-hour rind pickle

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- 4 chilled shallow plates

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- Julienne peeler or sharp knife for rind matchsticks

MISE EN PLACE

## Before You Start

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- 3 days before (T-72 h) — Build rind pickle. Peel thin outer green skin from watermelon rind. Cut 2 cups (~300 g) of inner white rind flesh into 3 × 30 × 5 mm matchsticks. In saucepan: 200 ml rice vinegar + 80 g sugar + 20 g salt + 1 tsp mustard seed + 1 tsp peppercorns + 1 bay leaf. Bring to boil; simmer 2 min until sugar + salt dissolve. Pack matchsticks into glass jar. Pour hot brine over. Cool to room temp. Refrigerate 72 h minimum (longer = more sour + more fermented-forward).

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- Same-day 3 h ahead — Chill watermelon whole in refrigerator (if not already cold). Chill 4 shallow plates in fridge or freezer.

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- 20 min ahead — Cut watermelon flesh into 3 × 3 × 8 cm batons (target 3 per plate). Remove any seeds. Return to fridge on covered plate.

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- 10 min ahead — Retrieve pickled rind from fridge, drain, pat dry briefly. Set out bottarga, microplane, Aleppo flakes, Maldon, lemon if using. Have Arbequina ready.

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- Service 2 min before eating — Assemble plates, finish tableside with bottarga shave + Aleppo + Maldon.

MAKE-AHEAD

## Timeline

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## METHOD

# The Cook

### 1 Phase 1 · Rind Pickle Build (15 min active, 72 h rest)

1. Start this 3 days before the dinner. The pickle ripens overnight — at 24 hours it's too sharp; at 48 it's pleasant; at 72-96 it's fully balanced, crunchy-sweet-sour with aromatic backbone.
2. Cut your watermelon in half. From one half, peel the outer green rind (discard or compost), exposing the pale-green-to-white inner rind. You want 2 cups (~300 g) of this inner rind.
3. Cut the inner rind into matchsticks: 3 mm × 3 mm × 30 mm. Length matters — this is a plate-garnish matchstick, not a chunk. Work carefully with a sharp knife.
4. In a small saucepan, combine 200 ml rice vinegar + 80 g sugar + 20 g kosher salt + 1 tsp whole mustard seed + 1 tsp whole black peppercorns + 1 bay leaf.
5. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring to dissolve sugar + salt. Boil 1 minute. Remove from heat.
6. Pack the matchsticks into a 16-oz glass jar or container. Pour the hot brine over, fully submerging the rind.
7. Let cool to room temperature (30 min). Cap. Refrigerate.
8. At 24 hours: tastes sharp + vegetal — not ready. At 48 hours: pleasant + balanced — early deployment OK. At 72-96 hours: ideal — crunchy, sweet-sour-aromatic. At 7 days: still good. At 14 days: beginning to over-ferment — eat or discard.



#### WHY THIS WORKS

Watermelon inner rind is firm *citrullus lanatus* flesh — high-pectin, modest-water-content cell walls that take to pickling better than the watery inner flesh. In a sweet-sour-salt brine, the rind undergoes fast lactic-acid fermentation (80% by time) plus acid-vinegar infiltration. The salt draws some water out via osmosis; the sugar enters the cells and equalizes the osmotic pressure; the vinegar acidifies the cell-wall pectin, creating crunch. Mustard seed contributes isothiocyanate aromatics that develop over 48-72 hours as the volatile compounds enter the fruit. The result is crisp, not mushy — a well-pickled rind holds shape for a week and lifts flavor for a month.

## 2 Phase 2 · Watermelon Preparation (15 min, day-of)

1. Confirm watermelon is refrigerator-cold ( $\leq 5$  °C internal). If freshly purchased at room temperature, refrigerate 3-4 hours minimum before cutting. Warm watermelon = watery plate.
2. Place watermelon on cutting board. Using a sharp chef's knife, slice off stem-end and blossom-end. Cut watermelon in quarters lengthwise.
3. From one quarter (reserve remaining for pickled rind Phase 1 or eating), slice 3 cm × 3 cm × 8 cm rectangular batons. The shape is deliberate: too-thin feels floppy, too-thick blocks the bottarga contact surface. Three by three by eight is the target.
4. Carefully remove any seeds from each baton with a paring knife. For seedless watermelon (common Florida commercial), skip this step.
5. Wrap the batons in cool damp cotton towel or paper towel and refrigerate on a tray until plating. Do NOT plate more than 30 minutes before service — the batons sweat as they sit, producing pooling liquid.
6. Chill 4 shallow plates: in freezer 20 min, then move to fridge until plating.



### WHY THIS WORKS

Watermelon flesh is 92% water. When it warms above 15 °C, the cell membranes begin releasing water via osmotic pressure, producing the 'watery plate' effect. Keeping the watermelon cold ( $\leq 5$  °C) slows this dramatically. The pre-chilled plate extends the hold time; a warm plate will cause water release in 2 minutes. For a plate-based service, cold is not optional — it is a chemistry requirement.

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### **Phase 3 · Assembly + Bottarga Shave (3 min, at service)**

1. Retrieve chilled plates from fridge. Plates should be frost-cold to touch.
2. On each plate, arrange 3 watermelon batons in a loose line or casual stack. Leave slight gaps — you want visual airflow between batons.
3. Scatter 6-8 pieces of pickled rind around the watermelon. The matchsticks should be visible but not a pile.
4. Drizzle 1 tsp Arbequina olive oil per plate, landing on and around the watermelon. Optional — the dish works without oil.
5. Sprinkle a light dust of Aleppo chile flakes (about 10-12 flakes per plate) — the chile should be visible but not aggressive.
6. Finish with 3-4 flakes of Maldon sea salt directly on the watermelon.
7. TABLESIDE: present the plate with a block of bottarga + a microplane grater. Shave the bottarga directly over each plate in the moment — 3-4 passes per plate, creating translucent amber shavings that drift across the watermelon surface.
8. Alternative: if not doing tableside shave, shave the bottarga onto each plate 30 seconds before service at the pass. Never pre-plate more than 60 seconds ahead; the bottarga begins to hydrate + dissolve.
9. Optional: microplane a whisper of lemon zest at the very end for aromatic lift.
10. Serve immediately. Each guest gets a fork + a knife; the dish eats best in 2-3 bites per baton.



#### **WHY THIS WORKS**

Microplaning bottarga at the plate is a chef's drama, but also chemistry. The roe's fat and salt content begin absorbing moisture from contact surfaces immediately. Freshly shaved at 0-30 seconds has maximum amber translucency + aromatic volatility. After 2 minutes, the shavings begin to hydrate and lose their crystalline appearance. For dinner-party service, the tableside shave is both more impressive and technically better.

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## Phase 4 · Service Window + Recovery (3 min)

1. The plate is at peak for 60-90 seconds after bottarga shave. Guests should eat immediately.
2. If any guest lingers: the pickled rind will begin to release its brine onto the plate within 2 minutes, creating a small acidic pool that actually enhances the flavor for a second bite. This is acceptable.
3. If the watermelon begins to pool water (>3 min on plate): the dish has started degrading. For service recovery: gently dab the plate with a clean side towel; the dish is still pleasant but textural cohesion is lost.
4. Second-service: if making multiple batches of 4 for a larger group, plate in waves. Do not pre-plate 12 at once; the last 4 will be wet by service time.
5. Leftovers (rare but possible): pickled rind holds 2 weeks refrigerated. Watermelon batons + bottarga leftovers should be combined into a morning-after snack with a drizzle of good EVOO and consumed same-day.



### WHY THIS WORKS

The service window is controlled by two independent clocks: the watermelon-water-release clock (started by plate warming) and the bottarga-hydration clock (started by shaving). Both are in the 2-3 minute range; the plate is viable until the faster one expires.

### QUICK REFERENCE

## Timing Cheat Sheet

STEP	TIME	CUE
Rind pickle begins	T- 7 2 h ( 3 days ahead)	Hot brine poured, cooled, refrigerated
Plates chilled + watermelon cold	T- 3 h	Plates $\leq 4$ °C, watermelon $\leq 5$ °C internal
Watermelon cut to batons	T- 2 0 min	Uniform 3×3×8 cm, seeded, returned to cold
Rind drained + mise ready	T- 1 0 min	Everything at plating station

STEP	TIME	CUE
Plate + shave bottarga tableside	T- 0	Bottarga dusted last; serve immediately

#### TROUBLESHOOTING

## Emergency Protocols

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## Technique Notes

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### Watermelon Peak-Season Discipline

#### SEASONAL FUNDAMENTALS

Watermelon is a peak-only ingredient. Miami's black-skin heirloom varieties from Homestead/Redland peak July-September; cooler months produce bland, grainy, watery fruit not worth serving to guests. If peak is not available, substitute the recipe entirely — do NOT try to force it. Off-peak substitutes: heirloom tomatoes with bottarga (September-October in Miami), honeydew melon at peak (August only), Persian cucumber slices with bottarga (year-round, structurally similar technique). The recipe teaches an IF seasonality rule: some dishes belong to one window and should not appear outside it.

### Microplane Pressure for Bottarga

#### FINISHING TECHNIQUE

Bottarga must be shaved with a Microplane grater — not a box grater, not a sharp knife, not a mandoline. The Microplane's very sharp, very shallow blades cut translucent amber shavings that are 0.1-0.2 mm thick — paper-thin, maximum surface area for flavor, dissolves on the tongue in 2-3 seconds. Box grater produces 1 mm chunks that are dense and fishy. Knife-slicing produces shards. The technique: hold bottarga block firmly over plate, make 3-4 full-length passes with medium pressure — too light = thick shaves; too heavy = grated-chunk texture. Pass the microplane over the block, not the block over the microplane.

## Three-Day Rind Pickle (Fast Refrigerator Ferment)

PRESERVATION · ZERO-WASTE

Watermelon inner rind (the white flesh between green outer skin and pink inner flesh) is a prime pickling candidate — firm pectin-rich cells, neutral-to-slightly-sweet base, takes aromatics beautifully. 3-day brine at 4 °C in rice vinegar + sugar + salt + mustard seed produces crunchy-sweet-sour matchsticks. The 72-hour window is ideal; shorter = sharp/undeveloped, longer = softer. This technique generalizes to: cucumber rind, daikon, beet rind, turnip — any vegetable with a firm pectin-rich structure. Zero-waste principle: every watermelon for watermelon-bottarga service produces pickled rind for the next three services.

## Bottarga di Muggine vs di Tonno

INGREDIENT KNOWLEDGE

Bottarga comes in two primary Mediterranean forms: muggine (gray mullet, Sardinian tradition) and tonno (tuna, Sicilian tradition). Muggine is milder, more amber, sweeter, and pairs well with fruit and olive oil — the recipe's canonical choice. Tonno is darker, sharper, more aggressively savory, and better with pasta or bread (not with watermelon). Muggine cures 4-6 months; tonno cures 3-4 months. Both come pressed into blocks or in whole lobes. For this recipe, insist on muggine. Price range: \$80-140/100g for Sardinian-direct premium; \$35-50/100g for commercial Italian-supermarket-import tier.

## Four-Ingredient Plating Philosophy

MENU DESIGN

Some dishes earn their place by doing very little. Watermelon + bottarga + pickled rind + Aleppo + Maldon = 5 elements; Arbequina optional brings it to 6. No herbs. No cheese beyond the bottarga. No greens. No crunch beyond the pickled rind. The discipline is in what you do NOT add. This is ingredient-first cooking: when two ingredients are exceptional, 6 supporting elements at most will frame them; more and the frame overtakes the subject. Cross-ref `swordfish-ceviche-bottarga` (same 4-ingredient rule) and `hamachi-crudo-yuzu-kosho` (5-ingredient rule).

## Tableside Finish as Kitchen Signaling

### SERVICE

Shaving bottarga tableside at the plate converts a dish from food into theater without adding complexity. Guests see the microplane, see the amber shavings fall, smell the roe's concentrated aroma — then eat within 60 seconds. The tableside move signals: (a) this ingredient is precious enough to protect until the last second, (b) this dish is made for YOU, not pre-plated, (c) timing matters. All three are part of the experience. Reserve this technique for: bottarga, truffle, aged parmesan, good olive oil. Do NOT do it with: garlic, citrus zest, standard salt (the gesture should be special).

## Matchstick Geometry Across Plate Elements

### KNIFE SKILLS

The recipe has three geometric requirements: watermelon batons  $3 \times 3 \times 8$  cm, pickled rind matchsticks  $3 \times 3 \times 30$  mm, bottarga shavings  $0.1 \times \text{whatever} \times \text{whatever}$  mm. The three dimensions are deliberately different because each element fills a different role: batons are the body (eat in 2 bites), matchsticks are punctuation (1 bite), shavings are flavor vector (dissolve). Eating the plate moves from large to small to invisible — a micro-narrative encoded in geometry. When a simple recipe is great, the geometry is almost always right. Cross-ref `hamachi-crudo-yuzu-kosho` for raw-fish slice geometry.

### PAIRING

## What to Drink

### White

Txakoli — Ameztoi Rubentis or Itsasmendi

*Saline, slightly sparkling, Basque coastal freshness pairs with bottarga's sea quality*

### White

Vermentino — Argiolas Costamolino (Sardinian)

*Native Sardinian grape; regional pairing authenticity + citrus-almond notes*

### **Sparkling**

Cava Brut Nature or Franciacorta

*Dry sparkling cuts through bottarga's fat + refreshes between bites; summer natural*

### **Sherry**

Manzanilla La Guita or Hidalgo La Gitana

*Saline Andalusian sherry complements the salt-cured roe quality*

### **Cocktail**

Spritz — Aperol 1 part + Prosecco 3 parts + soda splash + orange slice

*Summer-bitter-orange classic; doesn't fight the plate*

### **Non-alc**

Cucumber-mint sparkling water + lemon verbena + pink peppercorn

*Herbal-cucumber refresh that parallels the watermelon without competing*

## CONTEXT

# Menu Ideas

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### **Opener**

Watermelon · Bottarga · Pickled Rind (this recipe) — summer opener par excellence

### **Primo**

Risotto Carnaroli (UMAMI-11) or Farro con Porcini (UMAMI-11) — starchy, warm, contrast

## Main

Cochas al Pil-Pil (UMAMI-4) or Merluza a la Plancha con Refrito (UMAMI-4) — Mediterranean seafood continuation

## Dessert

Helado de Aceite de Oliva con Maldon (UMAMI-5) — olive-oil cohesion across the arc

### YOUR NOTES

## Cook Log

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### Session Notes

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ · Serves: \_\_\_\_ · Rating: \_\_ / 5

*Use this space to record what you changed, what worked, and what you'd do differently next time. Your future self will thank you.*



Stop following recipes. Start understanding food.

