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EC55-909 Cooking of Fish

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Cooking Of Fish

Ethel Diedrichsen
Extension Nutritionist

Fish is an excellent food. It compares favorably with meat and poultry in supplying high quality protein for building body tissues. Fish is rich in minerals especially phosphorus, calcium and iron. Fish from the sea are a rich source of iodine. Fish also contain thiamine, riboflavin and niacin. A serving of fat fish will supply some vitamin A and vitamin D.

The fat content of fish varies and depends upon the variety of fish and the season of the year. The fat fish usually have colored flesh and lean fish have white flesh. Included among the fat fish are catfish, eels, herring, lake trout, mackerel, salmon, sardines and swordfish. Lean fish are black bass, buffalo, carp, cod, flounder, haddock, perch, pike and pickerel.

SELECTION OF FISH

Fresh, whole fish will show the following characteristics:

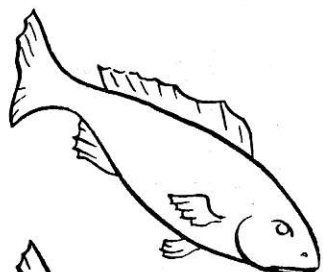
- Eyes: bright, clear, full and bulging.
- Gills: reddish-pink, free from slime or odor.
- Scales: cling tightly to the skin, bright colored with characteristic sheen.
- Flesh: firm and elastic, springing back when pressed, not separating from the bones.

The amount of fish to buy will depend to some extent on the kind of meal you are planning. The amounts listed here are those most commonly used in average servings:

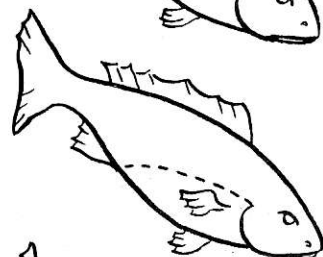
Whole fish	about 1 pound
Dressed fish	about 1/2 pound
Steaks, fillets, sticks	about 1/3 pound

BUYING FISH

Some fish markets offer you a choice of several forms and cuts. The steaks and fillets are usually the easiest to prepare for the table, but good fresh fish may come in any of these forms.



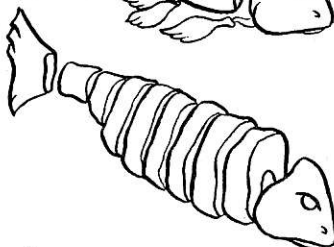
Whole or Round fish are sold just as they come from the water. Before cooking, the entrails, head, scales and sometimes the fins are removed. Large fish are split or cut into serving portions. Some small fish like trout or smelt are often cooked with only the entrails removed.



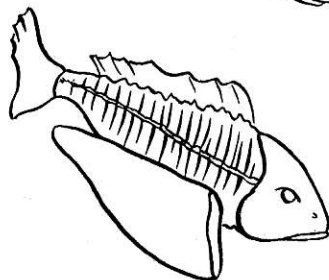
Drawn fish are whole fish with only the entrails removed. Head, scales and fins should be removed before cooking and the fish cut into serving portions. Small drawn fish or larger sizes intended for baking may be cooked without being cut.



Dressed fish are completely ready for cooking. The larger sizes may be baked or cut into steaks or serving-size pieces.



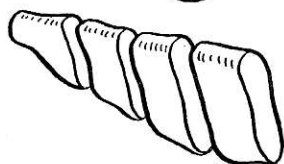
Steaks are slices cut across a large dressed fish. They usually are cut $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch thick. A cross section of the backbone is usually the only bone in the steak.



Fillets are the sides of the fish cut lengthwise away from the backbone. They are practically boneless and require no preparation for cooking. A fillet cut from one side of a fish is called "single" fillet. This is the type of fillet most generally seen in the market.



Butterfly fillets are the two sides of the fish corresponding to two single fillets held together by uncut flesh and skin.



Sticks are uniform pieces of fish cut lengthwise or crosswise from the fillets or steaks.

STORING FISH

Fresh fish will spoil easily if not handled with care. It should be stored in a tightly covered dish in the coldest part of the refrigerator or frozen. If this is not possible, it should be cooked at once and reheated for serving.

For freezing, fish should be cleaned and cut up ready to cook. It should be well wrapped in moisture-vapor-proof paper and frozen quickly. For extra protection, fish may be glazed by dipping unwrapped frozen fish into very cold water to form a thin film of ice. Repeat two or three times, then wrap and freeze.

Frozen fish will keep as long as it remains solidly frozen. If it thaws, use it at once. It is not necessary to thaw fillets, steaks, and dressed fish before cooking, but additional cooking time should be allowed. Thawing is necessary for the cleaning and dressing of whole or drawn fish. The best way to thaw fish is in the refrigerator at a temperature of 37° to 40°. The fish should be held at this temperature just long enough to be easy to handle.

CLEANING AND DRESSING FISH

Lay the fish on the table and grasp it firmly by the tail. Use a sharp knife with a stiff blade to scrape off the scales, working from the tail toward the head. Soak the fish in cold water a few minutes for easier scaling. Cut into the flesh at each side of the dorsal or large back fin. Remove the fin with a quick pull toward the head of the fish. Do not trim the fin with a shears or knife since the bones at the base will be left in the fish. Cut a slit in the body cavity from head to tail and remove the entrails. Cut off the head and tail and other fins. Wash fish in cold running water and wipe with a damp cloth.

SKINNING FISH

Cut off a narrow strip of skin along the spine from head to tail. Start near the gills and with a sharp knife pull the skin away from the flesh on one side. Repeat on the other side.

FILLETING FISH

Start at the tail and run a sharp knife under the flesh close to the backbone the entire length of the fish. Remove flesh from both sides in this manner. Take out any small bones with a pair of tweezers.

COOKING FISH

Fish is easy to cook. Just remember that fish is more often overcooked than not cooked enough. Too much cooking toughens the fish protein and makes it dry. Cook until just tender, then you'll have nicely browned fish with a delicate flavor and improved texture.

Lean fish are best for boiling and steaming. Fat fish are best for broiling and baking. All fish may be fried. All fish may be cooked by any of the basic methods with excellent results if allowances are made for the fat content. This means cooking lean fish with strips of bacon or basting with fat.

Basic Recipes For Fish

FRIED FISH

2 pounds fillets, steaks or
pan-dressed fish
1 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper

1 egg
1 tablespoon milk or water
1 cup bread crumbs, cracker
crumbs, cornmeal or flour

Cut fish into serving portions and season with salt and pepper. Beat egg slightly, and blend in the milk. Dip fish in the egg and roll in crumbs. Fry at a moderate heat in a small amount of melted fat. When fish is brown on one side, turn carefully and brown the other side. Cooking time is about 10 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fish. Drain on absorbent paper. Serve immediately with Maitre D'Hotel. Tartar or Hollandaise Sauce.
Yield: 6 Servings.

For Deep Fat Fried Fish use a deep kettle with a frying basket and enough fat to cover the fish, but do not have the kettle more than half full of fat. Heat the fat to 375°. Place a layer of fish in the frying basket and cook to an even golden brown, about 3 to 5 minutes. Raise basket, remove fish, and drain on absorbent paper. Serve immediately.

BAKED FISH

3 or 4 pound fish, dressed
1 1/2 teaspoons salt

4 tablespoons fat, melted
3 slices bacon (optional)

Clean, wash, and dry fish. Rub inside and out with salt. Place fish in a greased baking pan. Brush with melted fat and lay slices of bacon over the top. Bake in a moderate oven 350° for 40 to 60 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. If fish seems dry while baking, baste occasionally with drippings or melted fat. Serve immediately on a hot platter with Lemon Butter or Cucumber Sauce.
Yield: 6 servings.

Baked Stuffed Fish is prepared the same way, except that the fish is stuffed with bread or other dressing and the opening closed with needle and string or skewers, before it is placed in the baking pan.

BREAD STUFFING

3 tablespoons onions, chopped
3/4 cup celery, chopped
6 tablespoons butter or other
fat, melted
1 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon thyme, sage
or savory seasoning
4 cups day-old bread
crumbs

Cook the celery and onions in the melted fat for 10 minutes, or until tender. Add the cooked vegetables and seasonings to the bread crumbs, and mix thoroughly. If dressing seems very dry, add 2 tablespoons water, milk, or fish stock to moisten.

BROILED FISH

2 pounds fillets or steaks
1 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon pepper
4 tablespoons butter
or other fat, melted

Cut fish into serving portions and season with salt and pepper. Place fish on greased broiler pan 2 to 4 inches from the heat, skin side up, if skin has not been removed from fillets. Brush fish with melted fat. Broil 5 to 8 minutes or until slightly brown, baste with melted fat, and turn carefully. Brush other side with melted fat and cook about 5 to 8 minutes more. Fish is often broiled on one side only. Remove carefully to a hot platter and serve with Lemon Butter or Hollandaise Sauce.

OVEN FRIED FILLETS

2 pounds fillets
1 tablespoon salt
1 cup milk

1 cup bread crumbs
4 tablespoons butter
or other fat, melted

Cut fillets into serving portions. Mix the salt with the milk. Dip the fish in the milk and roll in crumbs; place in well greased baking pan. Pour melted fat over fish. Bake in a very hot oven (500°) 10 to 12 minutes. Serve at once with Tartar or Cucumer Sauce.

BAKED FILLETS OR STEAKS

2 pounds fish fillets or steaks
1 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon onion, grated
4 tablespoons butter or
other fat, melted
Paprika

Cut fish into serving portions and season with salt and pepper. Add the lemon juice and onion to the melted fat. Dip each piece of fish into this mixture and place in a greased baking pan. Pour the rest of the fat over the fish. Bake at 350° for 25 to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Sprinkle with paprika. Serve with Tomato or Tartar Sauce.

NEW ENGLAND FISH CHOWDER

1 pound fillets
2 tablespoons bacon, chopped
1/2 cup onions, chopped
2 cups hot water

1 cup potatoes, diced
2 cups rich milk
3/4 teaspoon salt
Dash pepper

Cut fillets in about 1-inch cubes. Fry bacon until crisp and browned. Add onions and brown slightly. Add water and potatoes and cook 10 minutes or until potatoes are partially tender. Add fish and cook until it can be flaked easily when tested with a fork. Add milk, seasonings and heat. Garnish with chopped parsley sprinkled over the top. Yield: 6 servings.

PICKLED FISH

Plain

1/2 cup vinegar
1/2 cup water
2 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 bay leaf
3/4 teaspoon mixed
pickling spices
1 lemon sliced thin

Mustard Pickle

1/3 cup vinegar
2/3 cup water
1 1/2 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 onions sliced
1/4 teaspoon mixed pickling
spices
1 bay leaf
1/4 cup prepared mustard

Measure the ingredients from one of the above recipes and bring to a boil. Simmer gently for several minutes. Place small, whole fish or cut-up pieces in the pickling sauce and simmer slowly 10 to 15 minutes. The pickling sauce should cover the fish. Let stand in a cool place for 24 hours before serving.

SMOKED FISH

Cut the fish in pieces of desired size. Soak in a saturated brine solution from 1 to 2 hours. Remove fish and drain.

Smoke the fish until richly browned and well flavored but not dry. The time required may be anywhere from 6 to 10 hours. When the smoking is completed, cool and store.

Smoked fish may be hung or laid on racks to dry; it may be kept in cold storage or frozen. Be sure to wrap the fish in moisture-proof paper to keep the smoke flavor from penetrating other foods. Smoked fish may also be canned. Pack carefully in pint jars and process for 90 minutes at 10 pounds pressure.

Smoked fish that is cooked from the heat of smoking is ready to eat. It may be used in recipes calling for fresh fish. Pieces of smoked fish will give a different flavor to casserole dishes, tossed salads sandwich spreads or scrambled eggs.

SMOKED FISH WITH TOMATO SAUCE

2 cups smoked fish
2 cups tomatoes
4 tablespoons onion, chopped

Salt and pepper
1/2 cup grated cheese

Place 1 cup of fish in greased casserole. Add half the onions and tomatoes and season. Add another layer the same way. Sprinkle cheese over the top. Bake in moderate oven until heated through and the top is browned. Yield: 4 servings.

SAUCES FOR FISH

Tartar Sauce

1/2 cup mayonnaise or salad dressing
 1 tablespoon onion, chopped
 1 tablespoon pickle, chopped
 1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
 1 tablespoon olives, chopped

Mix thoroughly and chill.

Cocktail Sauce

1 tablespoon grated horseradish
 1/2 cup catsup
 6 tablespoons lemon juice
 3 drops tabasco sauce
 1/8 teaspoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon celery salt

Blend and chill.

Cucumber Sauce

1/2 cup mayonnaise
 1/2 cup whipped cream
 1 cup diced, drained cucumber

Mix mayonnaise with whipped cream. Add diced cucumber and season with salt, pepper and paprika.

Maitre D'Hotel

1/4 cup butter
 1 teaspoon lemon juice
 1/8 teaspoon pepper
 1/2 tablespoon parsley, chopped

Cream the butter. Gradually stir in lemon juice and other ingredients. Shape into balls and chill.

Lemon Butter: Melt the butter. Add the remaining ingredients. Serve hot.

Tomato Sauce

1 tablespoon shortening
 1 small onion, chopped
 1 tablespoon green pepper (optional)
 1 1/2 cups tomatoes
 1 tablespoon flour
 1/2 teaspoon salt

Cook onion and green pepper in the fat until tender, but not brown. Add the flour, then the tomatoes and salt. Simmer 10 minutes. Strain if desired.

Cream Sauce

2 tablespoons butter or margarine
 2 tablespoons flour
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 Dash pepper
 Dash paprika
 1 cup rich milk

Melt butter and blend in flour, salt, pepper and paprika. Add milk slowly, stirring constantly to avoid lumps. Cook until smooth and thickened. Makes 1 cup.

Cheese Sauce: To Cream Sauce add 1/2 cup grated cheese. Stir until cheese is melted. Serve hot.

Egg Sauce: To Cream Sauce add 2 teaspoons prepared mustard and 2 sliced hard-cooked eggs.

Mock Hollandaise Sauce

1 cup Cream Sauce
 3 slightly beaten egg yolks
 3 tablespoons butter
 5 teaspoons lemon juice

Add the Cream Sauce to egg yolks slowly. Blend in the butter and lemon juice.