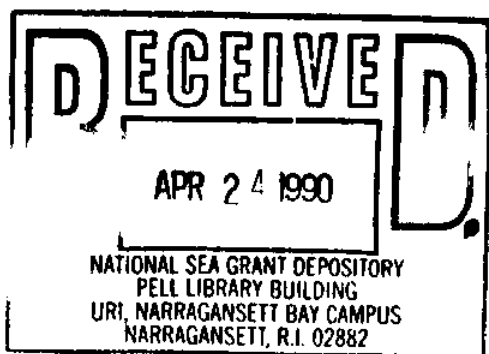


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Consumer Tips For Purchasing High Quality Seafood



Fresh seafoods, like many other foods, are more abundant during certain seasons of the year. Your seafood dealer can tell you about seasonal offerings, and can indicate the most economical varieties. Always purchase seafood from a dealer that maintains high quality.

Base your seafood purchases on quality. Frozen seafood can be superior in quality to fresh products. Many fish and shellfish are "flash frozen" within hours of harvest, while it might take several days for the same seafood to make it to your seafood dealer as "fresh."

When you purchase seafoods, look for the following characteristics of high quality.

Fresh Whole Fish

- Appearance is bright and shiny, and most of the scales are intact and adhere tightly to the skin. Each species has characteristic markings and colors which fade and become less pronounced as the fish loses freshness.
- Eyes are bright, clear, full, and often protrude. As quality goes down, the eyes often turn pink and become cloudy and sunken. This does not always apply to small-eyed fish such as salmon.
- Gills are red and free from slime. The color fades with time to light pink, then grey, and finally greenish or dull brown.
- Odor is fresh and mild. A fish just out of the water has practically no "fish" odor. The fishy odor develops with time, but should not be strong or objectionable.
- Flesh is firm, elastic, and not separating from the bones.

Fresh Fillets and Steaks

- Odor is fresh and mild.
- Flesh is moist, firm, elastic, and has a fresh-cut appearance without traces of browning or drying around the edges.
- Pre-packaged steaks and fillets are tightly wrapped. There is little or no air space between the fish and the wrapping material, and no liquid in the package.

Frozen Seafood

- Flesh is solidly frozen with no discoloration or drying (freezer burn) on the surface.
- Odor is not evident or is very slight.
- Wrapping material is moisture/vapor proof, fits closely around the product, and is undamaged.
- Packaging materials do not contain ice crystals, or have water stains or other indications that the product had thawed at any point.
- Breaded and unbreaded packaged products have a clean, uniform appearance. Individual pieces are easily separated and not frozen together. Breading is intact.
- Packaged frozen seafoods may have an expiration date stamped on the label. The seafood should be used before the expiration date.

Temperature is important for seafood quality. Fresh seafood should be displayed at 30-32°F; frozen seafood at 0°F or below. Packaged fresh and frozen seafood products should be stored below or behind the "load lines" in self-service display cases.

Shrimp

- Fresh shrimp have a mild odor and firm textured meat. The shell or meat is not slippery, and there are no black spots or patches on the shell or meat.
- The shell of raw shrimp may be grayish green, pinkish tan, or light pink. When cooked, the shell turns red and the meat takes on a similar reddish tint.
- Cooked shrimp have red shells, firm meat, and a mild odor.
- To prevent cross-contamination, unpackaged cooked shrimp are not displayed near unpackaged fresh or live seafoods.

Clams, Oysters and Mussels

- *Purchase raw shellfish carefully.* Buy raw clams, oysters and mussels only from reputable markets. If in doubt, ask the seafood market personnel to show you the certified shipper's tag that accompanies "shell on" products or check the shipper number on shucked oyster containers.
- Clams, oysters and mussels in the shell are alive, and the shells close tightly when tapped. Gaping shells indicate that the shellfish are dead and not edible.
- Shucked oysters are plump, and have a mild odor, a natural creamy color, and clear liquid or nectar.

Scallops

- Fresh scallops have a sweetish odor and are free of excess liquid when packaged. The meat of the large sea scallop is white, orange or pink. Smaller bay and calico scallops are white, light tan, or pinkish.

Crabs, Lobsters and Crayfish

- Live crabs, lobsters, spiny lobsters, and crayfish move their legs. The "tail" of a live lobster curls under the body and does not hang down when the lobster is picked up.
- Frozen spiny or rock lobster tails have clear white meat, no odor, and are hard-frozen.
- Cooked crabs, lobsters, and crayfish have bright orange to red shells and are free of any disagreeable odor.
- To prevent cross-contamination, unpackaged cooked crabs, lobsters and crayfish, and cooked crab meat, lobster meat and crayfish meat, are not displayed near unpackaged fresh or live seafoods.

Smoked Fish

- Smoked fish are bright and glossy. There is no dried blood or mold on the product.
- To prevent cross-contamination, smoked fish are not displayed near unpackaged fresh or live seafoods.

Surimi-Based Seafood Products

- Simulated crab meat, lobster meat, shrimp, scallops and other seafood products made from surimi have a fresh and mild odor.
- Simulated seafood products are moist, and have a fresh appearance without traces of browning or discoloration.
- To prevent cross-contamination, simulated seafood products are not displayed near unpackaged fresh or live seafoods.

Ways to prepare seafood...

*Poached
Baked
Broiled
Sauteed
Fried
Grilled
Smoked
Microwaved*

The author is Robert J. Price, Seafood Technology Specialist, Department of Food Science & Technology, University of California, Davis, California 95616

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