

CFG: Fish

Jeff's AppBooks Network

... Compartmentalizing Anthologies ...

With multiple professional fishermen in the family ... we do love our fish, lobster and the like.

Boiled, Steamed and Poached

Boiled

This is a horrible thing to do to a fish ! It is, however, the most common way to prepare salt fish. Luckily those are off the table with Grandpa's diet.

A more common approach, mistaken for 'boiled', is to soak out salt fish, or start with fresh fish and place them on top of potatoes that are close to being done. Because the potatoes were boiled, the fish are often said to be boiled as well.

In reality, it is closer to poached or steamed, depending on how high the water is.

Poached

If the fish (soaked out salt fish or fresh fish) is placed in a thin amount of water, generally in a frying pan, and covered with a lid. The water is brought to just a simmer and the steam is trapped. This is generally seen as poaching a fish. It works really well with mild flavoured white fish like Tilapia.

Steamed

To steam a fish, whether soaked out salt fish or fresh, the fish is suspended above water and cooked with just the steam.

The two easiest ways to do this are on top of potatoes or on top of rice.

There are urban legends of steaming salmon in a good dish washer.

Ceviche

This is a Spanish style of prepping mild white fish (it fails miserably if you use an oily fish like trout or salmon).

The specific origins are up for grabs but Wikipedia lists it as the national dish of Peru and a staple throughout Latin America.

A French version called Poisson Cru (French for raw fish) is prepped the same way with the addition of coconut milk after draining the citrus.

I learned this from a friend in Korea in 2006(ish).

Charley's Ceviche (2021)

- cubed white fish
- fresh lemon, lime and orange juice
- honey
- Mix the above, cover and chill for 20 min
- tomatoes, jalapenos, onion, garlic
- salt and pepper
- Mix the above with fish and juices, cover and chill for 10 min
- Drain fluids, mix in avocado, mint, cilantro
- toss fish and herbs, salt and pepper to taste
- serve with chips or toast

Octopus Ceviche (circa 2016)



Fresh octopus ceviche is great in the first 12 hrs. It's still pretty good at 24 hrs but goes down hill quickly. The acids turn the octopus to mush after that.

Tilapia Ceviche (circa 2015)



In Canada, my favorite fish to use is tilapia fillets (like in those photos). You cut the raw fish into bite-sized pieces and soak it in lemon, lime or a mix of juices. (I like mixed, my mother likes just lemon and my family does not like this at all.)

You leave the fish soak for a few hrs. The acids denature the proteins 'cooking them'. You can eat it in a few minutes or hours but the fish starts to break down after a day or so and loses its appeal after 2.

When it's time to eat, fish out the fish, add a salsa (purchased or homemade) and serve with bread, crackers or the like.

Deep Fried

This is truly the forte of my Uncle. Overall, the same milk wash, flour roll, egg wash, crumb roll, deep fry it in fat scenario. Just gotta watch the salt for Grandpa.

Fish and Brewis

A Newfoundland Tradition, it's a fish hash done with a traditional ship's hard tack (brewis) instead of potato.

- make scrunchions (diced salt pork fat, fried golden brown in a titch of cooking oil)
- fry up the onions in the scrunchions and goodness
- fry up salted fish (soak it out if need be) in the goodness
- fry up the brewis (a type of Nfld hard bread, soaked in water over night)

Clan Mayo made this for my birthday in 2021 - was excellent.

Pan Fried

As the name implies, this is fish fried in a pan.

Other than the 'no salt' butter for Grandpa, this is pretty straight forward milk wash, rolled in flour, egg wash, rolled in crumbs, fried in fat kind of process. Or some variation there of.

Salted or Corned Fish

We salted a lot of fish every year for food and for bait. Just my uncle's salt bait for lobster fishing requires 400-500 lbs of salt and he only sets 75 traps. All off limits for Grandpa though.

Salted or Corned fish will last months (entire winters) if stored in sealed containers. After 'struck', the fish does not even need to be refrigerated but can be stored in a basement or garage.

'Struck or Struck Through' is easy to tell, poke the fish, it should be not just firm but hard as a cardboard or harder ... just like beef jerky.

Many, most, all recipes use '100% pickle'.

'100% pickle' is max strength salt brine.

The section on Salt goes into detail but basically 100% pickle is 4 water to 1 salt.

Whether dry salted or corned in a bucket, take out the amount of fish you want to cook with. Soak it in fresh clean water for at least 12 hrs and change the water at least twice, 3 or 4 times is better (IMHO).

From there steam it, make chowder or fish cakes.

Dry Salted Fish

Quick Dry Salted Fish

1. Clean and fillet the fish.
2. Dust a thin layer of salt on the bottom of a tray.
3. Lay in the fish, coat with a layer of salt.

Make sure there is a few inches of unused tray at one end of the tray. This will shortly become the 'bottom'.

4. Lay in another layer of fish and coat with salt. Leave the same space.
5. Continue until enough fish is salted.
6. Place tray in the fridge at a slight incline with the 'bottom' at the bottom of the incline.
Salt will draw water from the fillets, it will run down the tray and collect in the 'bottom'.
It should be periodically removed so none touches the fillets.
Leave in the fridge to drain fluid for 12 hrs (overnight works but is difficult to drain fluid unless large tray / bottom is used).
7. When ready to use, rinse off salt and pat dry. Fish will be just like a Dry Salted fillet that was soaked over night.

Corned or Wet Salted Fish

Option A

1. Dust the bottom of a bucket.
2. Add a layer of fresh, clean fillets and dust with salt.
3. Repeat until happy with the amount or the bucket is 75% full.
4. Seal the bucket and place in the fridge.
5. Salt will draw water from the fillets creating the brine.
Brine level will rise until the fish is 'struck'. This usually takes a few days.
6. Top up the water, generously covering the fish (holding it down with a plate is helpful).
Add salt and mix (not disturbing the fish) until the salt stops dissolving. Crystals will remain on the plate (if that's what you are using). This is '100% pickle'.

Option B

Mix up 100% pickle in whatever volume you need. Experience will tell you this.

Slow add fresh, clean fillets, stirring well to make sure fillets make 100% contact with brine.

Don't pack too tightly.

Hold everything under the surface with a plate.

Option A is the most economical but takes the longest and is the most labor intensive with the greatest risk of 'not enough salt' (fish spoils).

Option B is the fastest and safest but wastes a bit of salt.

Fast Corned Fish

This is only really useful for small, last minute preparations.

Mix up 100% pickle in a pot. Add fresh, clean fillets and bring to a simmer.

Simmer to taste - I like 5 to 10 minutes. Enough time to cook the fish through.

William Larkham Jr (Youtube)

This is a Newfoundland chap with an excellent Youtube channel. He salts his cod a little differently. He fillets or butterflies them. He lays them out in a single layer and dusts them with coarse salt (like my pickling salt). I would describe it as a light dusting. He leaves them to brine for a few hrs (up to 5-6 hrs). The more salt, the shorter the time. The thicker the fish, the longer the time. When they are salted to how he likes them, he rinses them quickly, pats them dry, puts them in freezer bags and freezes them.

I don't remember him ever soaking out his salt fish when he cooks with it, so it must be lightly salted.

A brine (wet or dry) is a mixture of salts, sugars and herbs designed to dehydrate the fish. This firms up the meat, adds flavours and gets the fish ready to take the most smoke flavours as well.

*** With Oily or Slimy fish pre-brine to cut slime, oil and blood. This is done with 1 cup salt in 2 L of water. Soak the fish for 30 min, drain and brine properly.

The pellicle is the shiny 'skin' that forms after salt dehydration that seals in juices and forms a layer that the smoke soaks into.

Old School 100% Pickle

100% Pickle is covered in CFG : Salts and Brines. The nickle tour is that it is a 4:1 water to salt. It will make a potato or egg float.

Some peeps put brown sugar and other goodness in 100% pickle.

Fish are pre-brined to cut oil, blood etc, they are put in 100% pickle for a short period of time - this is one of those - to taste - kind of things.

- Thin fillets are in the pickle for 15 minutes.
- Thicker fillets are in for 20-30 minutes (thick salmon, shad, big eels, whole mackerel, whole kiack).
Thicker fillets can also be scored to let the brine the deepest sections.
- Whole fish can go in for an hour or more.

Couple of notes on fish :

- Shad and Kiack (Gaspereau / Alewives) are really slimy and need to be pre-brined but not scaled.
- Eels are unbelievably fatty. The first time I did eels in my Uncle's Bradley smoker I ended up having to pressure wash the inside to get it clean.

Less than 100% Pickle

Brines vs Dry Rubs - it's the same no matter what. The ratios of dry ingredients is the same for both. These brines are very weak compared to 100% pickle. It is not uncommon to be 1 cup of salt in 2 L of water. The brining process takes much longer - 12 to 24 hrs. Brines have water in them. The fish is submerged and held under, usually by a plate or similar. Fish that are done with a dry rub are rinsed, patted dry, coated in the dry rub and sealed in a zip lock bag. Both Brines and Dry Rubs are allowed to set for 12 to 24 hrs.

Ratio of Salt to Sugar (usually brown or maple syrup) can be anything from 1:1, to 5:1 depending on how sweet you want the finished product.

Brines and Rubs can include cracked black pepper, onion, garlic, lemon juice, fennel, chile, coriander, bay leaves, cloves, allspice, sage

The more salt you add (relative to the amount of fish), the faster the fish will strike through (be the correct amount of salty).

I don't like doing fish this way. I prefer 100% pickle. Brine them for 15 min to 1 hr. Take them out, air dry them to form the pellicle, then brush them with a light coat of dry rub (without salt). Even just a light coat of molasses is excellent.

Rum Brine

→1 L water

→4 tbsp Soy Sauce

→3 tbsp sea salt

→1 tbsp oil

→1 cup syrup

→1/2 cup black rum

When the brining stage is complete, rinse the fish, pat it dry and air dry it somewhere cool (inside a fridge works) to allow the pellicle to form.

Species



Roe are the eggs inside a fish. In these photos, it's shad roe from a fishing trip in 2015.

You can roll them in flour and spices (or not) and fry them in butter or bacon fat. My Uncle Bub used to deep-fry herring roe, which is very good. Friends (family), Dell and Cindy, use to smoke kayak, fillets or roe and all.

As a teenager I worked for a local man named Philip, on his herring barge. It rained live fish on me all day, literally, and I waded through them with a bat for sharks and a bucket for mackerel, cod and similar goodies. The herring were Philip's and while valuable, the herring roe was more so.

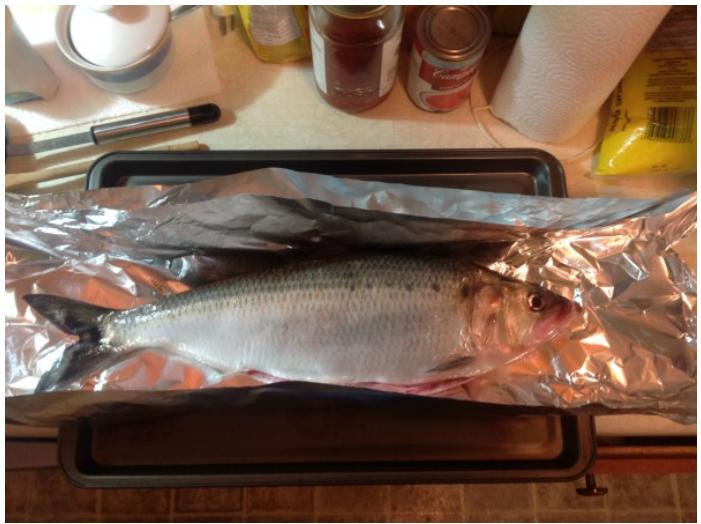




Kiack, Gasperaux, Alewives, they probably have more names. They are a saltwater member of the herring family that run up rivers to spawn once a year. Traditionally you dip them, like my Uncle in these photos. Or you set nets.

In their natural state, they are slimy, bony little things that can be dangerous to pick up. Cleaned and scaled they are excellent smoked and fried. They are 1/2 a kg or less.





Shad are giant cousins of a kiack. They are a saltwater member of the herring family that spawns in freshwater rivers. Shad can easily go 2 or 3 kg. Not quite as slimy, they have very different, but even more, bones. Tiny little hair thin Y bones everywhere. The salt brine used in smoking softens them enough you do not really notice them. I bake shad from time to time. It's messy to clean but makes a very very good hash or fish cake.

Saudi Arabian Fish

In 2015 I moved to the KSA, again. It was very different from when I was here in 2010 and more relaxed so I took up an old hobby - BBQ'ing fish outside.

There was a very nice CarreFour near me with an excellent seafood section. The locals have the staff clean, scale, prep or fillet all their fish for them. It took me a while to convince them to just sell me the fish, I could clean it myself.

Naturally I got in trouble for doing this on the sidewalk. I moved closer to a vacant lot and kept at it. I BBQ'd about once a week and kept the cooked fish in the fridge to pick over during the week.

These are some of the amazing fish I had. My students told me the true Saudi fish were from Dammam while many of the others were from Turkey and France.



Check out those teeth. This little guy was only 0.5 kg. That's a normal tablespoon in his mouth.

The first odd fish(es) to cross my plate in the KSA were a Turkish Bass (top) and a Saudi Barracuda (bottom).

I steamed them on the BBQ the first time, stuffed with onions. Turns out they both of thick, firm, white flesh with a lot of fat in them.



A beautiful little fish. A tad oily but grilled on a BBQ took care of that. They are a little on the thick side so they need to cook longer than their friends



A mackerel is a mackerel. A tad oily but grilled on a BBQ fixed that.

To the left - Saudi Mackerel



Above - Russian Mackerel sold in Saudi.



Saudi Hamam

A non-descript little fish. Excellent on the BBQ.



Saudi Nagroodor

A non-descript little fish. Excellent on the BBQ.



Tilapia, grilled on the BBQ. Hands down the best fish I had in Saudi.

Mustaq (co-worker) and I gave 1 to a co-worker from Africa, the man near cried it reminded him of his mother's cooking so much.