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Broiled, Sautéed, Roasted, Poached

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If you're serious about eating sustainable fish, you may have given up on the most fundamental of all: the white fillet. After nearly exhausting cod stocks 20 years ago, we have gone through a dozen or more alternatives, from red snapper to orange roughy to so-called Chilean sea bass, and fished them all practically out of existence.

Now it seems difficult to know which fish are managed well enough to eat without guilt. (As it happens, cod, of all things, isn't bad right now, as long as it isn't caught by a trawler.) But if you buy from a reliable store, like Target, Wegmans or Whole Foods, which have adopted seafood-sustainability practices far more effectively than many other major retailers, or consult online sources like the Monterey Bay Aquarium, you can eat white-fleshed fish without guilt.

The next problem is that you may wind up buying a fish with which you're unfamiliar. Is it cod, catfish, sea bass, halibut, grouper, tilefish, haddock, some form of snapper — or what?

The good news is that it barely makes any difference. You can cook any white fillet the same way you cook any other white fillet: broiled, sautéed, roasted or poached, and teamed with just about any seasoning you can think of, from the obvious, like [tomatoes](#) and capers, to the semiexotic, like sugar and fish sauce. (In this recipe chart, I'm assuming you'll always use salt and pepper.) And this isn't just me giving you permission or a barely acceptable compromise. It works.

The chart on the following page provides ideas for cooking 1½ pounds of white fillet, whether whole or cut into individual portions. None of these recipes take more than half an hour from start to finish; thicker pieces of fish will cook in 15 minutes or less, thinner pieces in under 10. You can tell that any fillet is done when it's opaque and a thin-bladed knife meets little resistance when you use it to poke the thickest part of the fish.

Cooking white fish is easy. The hard part — besides figuring out what's sustainable — is choosing the recipe.

1. BROILED



With Tomatoes and Capers

Set rack 4 inches from heat source. Spread a broiler-safe pan with olive oil. Add fish. Mix 1 pound sliced tomatoes with oil and 2 tablespoons each capers and chopped red onion. Spread over and around fish; broil. Garnish: Chopped parsley and lemon wedges.

Tacos

Skip tomatoes and capers. Rub fish with vegetable oil and a mild chili powder; broil. Meanwhile combine 2 chopped cucumbers, 1/2 cup chopped cilantro, 1 minced hot chili and 2 tablespoons lime juice. Flake fish and serve in warm corn tortillas with cucumber salsa.

Caramelized Fish

Skip tomatoes and capers. Heat a little vegetable oil in pan; dredge fish in a mixture of brown sugar and (lots of) coarse black pepper. Broil carefully; fish will brown quickly. Drizzle with fish sauce. Garnish: Mint (lots), minced chili (optional).

2. SAUTÉED



Cornmeal-Crisped

Cut fish into 4 pieces and soak in 1½ cups buttermilk. Combine 1 cup cornmeal with 1 tablespoon chili powder. Put a large skillet over medium heat; add 1 tablespoon each olive oil and butter. Pull half the fish from buttermilk; drain, then dredge in cornmeal; cook until golden, turning once. Wipe skillet clean, then repeat. Garnish: Lemon and parsley or cilantro.

Classic Sautéed

Skip buttermilk, cornmeal and chili powder. Beat 2 eggs with ¼ cup chopped parsley. Dredge the fish lightly in all-purpose flour, then in egg mixture; cook in butter and oil in two batches. Garnish: Chopped parsley, lemon wedges.

Prosciutto-Wrapped

Skip buttermilk, cornmeal and chili powder. Lay 2 slices of prosciutto, slightly overlapping, on work surface; top with basil leaves. Wrap each piece of fish in prosciutto/basil, then repeat. Cook in oil only in two batches. Garnish: More basil.

3. ROASTED



With Herbs

Heat oven to 475. Put 4 tablespoons butter in an ovenproof pan and place in oven to melt. Add 4 tablespoons chopped herbs (a combo is best — parsley, dill, basil, tarragon, thyme, etc.), then add fish. Roast, turning once. Garnish: The pan juices.

With Potatoes

Skip butter and herbs. Heat oven to 425. Toss 2 pounds sliced new potatoes with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil. Roast, turning occasionally, until brown. Add 1 tablespoon chopped sage and 1 teaspoon (or more) minced garlic. Top with fish and 2 tablespoons oil. Roast until fish is done. Garnish: Pan juices.

With Leeks and Bacon

Skip butter and herbs. Toss 4 sliced leeks and 2 ounces chopped bacon (optional) with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil. Roast for 10 minutes, then add 1 tablespoon thyme leaves and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white wine. Roast 20 minutes, then top with fish and 2 tablespoons oil and roast until fish is done. Garnish: More thyme.

4. POACHED



With Ginger and Soy

Put a large, deep skillet over medium heat; add 2 tablespoons vegetable oil and 1 tablespoon minced ginger; cook until sizzling. Add fish, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup soy sauce, $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups water, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped scallions, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped cilantro and a teaspoon rice vinegar. Boil, cover and turn off heat. Fish will be done in about 10 minutes. Garnish: Chopped scallions.

Curried With Zucchini

Sauté 1 chopped onion and 2 chunked zucchini in oil for 5 minutes, then add 1 tablespoon ginger and 1 tablespoon curry powder (or to taste). Cook for a minute, then add fish. Substitute 1 cup coconut milk for soy sauce and use 1 cup water. Skip scallions and vinegar. Garnish: Cilantro.

In Tomato-Fennel Broth

Skip ginger; use olive oil. When oil is hot, add 1 chopped onion and 2 chopped fennel bulbs; cook 5 minutes. Add the fish, a pinch of saffron and 1 tablespoon fennel seeds. Substitute 1 cup diced tomatoes (canned are fine) for soy sauce; use 1 cup water. Skip scallions, cilantro and rice vinegar. Garnish: Chopped fennel fronds.