



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release ON RECEIPT

PRE-PAN PREPARATION FOR AMATEUR ANGLERS AND OTHERS

According to the old receipt for rabbit stew, you must first catch the hare.

Assuming that the comparable hurdle is over, if one's intent is to sit down to a dinner of seafoods, however, there is still the matter of getting the fish or shellfish ready to apply the proper cooking method.

Here, then, as compiled by the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, is suggestion about the best way to open an oyster or clam, clean a fish, with added facts on the arcana of "getting at" a lobster or crab with least effort, filleting, de-boning, etc.

Re: Oysters and Clams

(Assuming you do not dredge your own oysters...) in the shell, they are sold by the dozen; "shucked" oysters, by the dozen, pint or quart. If bought in the shell, the latter should be tightly closed as an indication of the oyster's freshness. Shucked oysters should be plump, with no sunken areas or evidence of shrinkage. The liquor should be clear, fresh and sweet smelling.

Now: wash your oysters-in-shell thoroughly; rinse them in cold water, but do not soak. Insert a strong, thick knife between shell halves near the thick end, and run it around the back until you feel the blade cut the holding muscle. Discard the flat shell, but don't pour out the liquid from the oysters, then remove any small pieces of shell remaining. Serve your oysters on the deep half of the shell--or as desired, with proper condiments.

There are two general types of clams: soft; and the hard, or "quahog" clams. The latter group is divided into three classes: littlenecks, small in size; the cherry stone, medium-sized; and the large, "chowder" clams. The former two classes may be served raw.

Campers on the Atlantic seacoast who gather their own, would ordinarily use only the soft shell clams, several varieties of which are found in sandy beaches and flats; on the Pacific Coast, hard clams are often used in outdoor cookery.

After gathering, the clams should be thoroughly washed in fresh water to remove sand. If time allows, place the clams in clean salt water in a shallow pan for about three hours before using, sprinkling a handful of corn meal over them. They will absorb this and work out sand which may be held in the shell. Only live clams with shells tightly held together should be cooked.

When store purchased, the shells should be tightly closed or close at a touch, as an indication of freshness. They may be opened with a knife, like oysters, or steamed open.

Some sympathetic inventor has come to the layman's rescue and put at his disposal a handy wooden block for opening either oysters or clams. With it goes this text: "It is a trough-like arrangement made of three pieces of soft clear wood about 7 inches long, into which the hinged end of the shell oyster is placed obliquely downward and to the left. The oyster is held in position with the left hand, leaving the right hand free to push the blade of the knife between the lips (shells) of the oyster. Do not point the knife toward the hand; thus is obviated any danger of the knife slipping and cutting the hand. The knife is forced down to cut the lower end of the muscle, the shell is pried open, and the upper end of the muscle cut." So science simplifies the opening of an oyster.

Re: Fish

Fish should be dressed as soon as possible after being caught or if purchased whole. At all times, fish should be protected from exposure to sun and wind. By dressing fish at the place where they are taken, general nuisance around the camp is avoided, and food is provided for wildlife. After this dressing, fish may be packed in wet grass. They should be kept as cool as possible, and not stored more than a few hours unless preserved by salt.

A few species of fresh-water fish, especially in summer, will have a "muddy" flavor if prepared in the ordinary way. Much of this objectionable flavor is in the skin. The fish may be greatly improved by skinning, then soaking in salted water overnight.

If ingredients are available, a superior treatment is to rub into the skinned and split fish flesh the following mixture:

1 cup salt	1 tsp. black pepper
1 cup crushed onion	1/8 tsp. mace
2 Tbsps. vinegar	

After standing in a deep dish for one hour, the mixture is washed off and discarded. Fish prepared in this way will seldom require further seasoning, except when boiled.

To remove scales, scrape fish beginning at the tail and working toward head. Use the back of a heavy knife and hold it nearly flat against the fish.

The head and tail are usually left on small fish and on large fish to be served whole. Make a slit down body cavity from gills to vent, remove entrails and wash away any blood. Scrape backbone clean and remove black membrane, if present, by rubbing with salt. Remove fins, gills, and eyes. If head and tail are to be removed, cut off gills with head. When preparing large flat fish such as flounder, the entrails, which are near the head, are easily removed when the head is cut off; or they may be removed after cutting a small opening just under the head. Wash fish thoroughly and wipe dry. If head and tail are removed, boil with fins to make stock.

To skin fish, remove fins along backbone and cut off a narrow strip of skin down the entire length of backbone. Loosen the skin from bony part of gills on both sides. Draw the skin off toward the tail. If the fish is fresh the skin can be drawn off easily. If flesh is soft, work carefully and loosen skin with knife when necessary to avoid tearing flesh.

After removing skin from one side, turn fish over and remove skin from other side. To skin flat fish such as flounder, do not cut off head and tail. Cut the skin across the body just above the tail and loosen. Work the skin loose along one side of the body toward the head and pull gently toward other side of body to strip off skin. Strip the skin from the other side in the same way.

Fish may also be skinned after boning and cutting into fillets. Fat fish should not be skinned before cooking.

Here, as added information, is a simple method of preserving surplus fish for a day or two. Scale, clean, and trim the fish: small fish may be split through the back, larger ones split into halves or filleted. The sides of flesh should not be over one inch thick. Wash the fish, drain, and cover all surfaces with as much fine salt as will cling with careful handling, using about 1 pound of salt to 5 pounds of fish. Pack the fish in a deep vessel and store in as cool a place as possible for 4 to 6 hours. The brine formed and any excess salt should then be rinsed from the fish which should be wiped dry and again kept as cool as possible until used, preferably within two days.

De-boning a fish, ordinarily, is a simple, common sense procedure--let your eyes and fingers guide you.

To bone fish, clean fish and skin if desired. Continue cut beyond vent to tail. Beginning at the tail, insert a sharp knife under flesh close to backbone being careful not to pierce skin on other side of body. Making as clean a cut as possible, follow backbone to head with knife, thus loosening flesh from entire side of fish in one piece. Loosen flesh from other side in same way. Remove backbone in one piece and any small bones. Spread fish open in one piece.

For the boning of shad it is suggested you write the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., and enclose 10 cents for a copy of Investigational Report No. 38, "Marketing of Shad on the Atlantic Coast."

If you are patient, however, here is an alternate idea: a New England recipe for cooking shad so that the bones melt away--"it is all in the baking."

"Place shad on rack in the baking pan to keep it out of the water, filling the pan below. An upturned tin of any kind will do if you haven't a rack. You'll need two or three cups of water in the pan. Then, with the cover on, bake for five hours--not four or three, but five whole hours--basing frequently and renewing water if necessary. A tablespoon of finely chopped onion, chopped celery and a bay leaf added to the water in the pan gives a delicious flavor to the shad. A few minutes before serving, remove the cover and let it brown. Bake at 300 degrees F. temperature."

Re: Lobsters and Crabs

"How to open a cooked lobster" seems to be essential data to this compilation. Here is the way the experts say it should be done:

In order to get the meat out of a cooked lobster, split the lobster open by placing it, feelers down, on a board; next, with a sturdy knife, cut through top and bottom shell, separating the lobster into two halves. Then, with a small paring knife, remove the long dark line which can be seen running down through the white meat from head to tail and, in addition, lift out the filling in the head. All that remains is edible. The meat in the large claws may be obtained by cracking each claw--with fingers, if you're up to it, or with wooden pliers which may be purchased.

The blue crab is the most widely distributed of the several varieties of these crustacea. The following details apply to this particular variety but with slight modifications may guide one in handling the others. Only live crabs should be cooked. The live blue hard crab should be handled with caution, unless the smaller sides of the claws are unjointed.

Hard Shell Crabs

Prepare a boiling solution made up in the proportion of 1 qt. water, 1/8 cup vinegar, 1 tbsp. salt, 1/2 tbsp. red pepper (if available). While this is heating, scrub and rinse the crabs. Boil the crabs for 5 minutes and simmer 10 minutes longer. Pull off the legs and claws. Split these and remove the meat. Break off the segment that folds under the body from the rear. Holding the body of a crab in the left hand, back toward you, pull off the top shell. Remove the digestive tract and rinse in water. Split the crab and remove the hard membrane that covers the body meat with a nut pick or something similar.

Soft Shell Crabs

These are crabs that have shed their old shell and are about to form a new one.

Cut off the segments that fold under the rear of the body; then cut off the face to a point about 1/2 inch in rear of the eyes and remove all of the gills. Wash the crab thoroughly. In a kettle or deep frying pan put enough cooking oil to half cover a single layer of crab. Heat the oil until smoking begins. Prepare a salt solution made in the proportion of 2 tbsps. salt in 1 cup water. Soak the crabs in this for 1-1/2 minutes and drain them. Fry the crabs to a golden brown, turning them as required. The whole crab is edible.

Miscellaneous

Fillets are the solid, all-meat sides of the entire fish cut length-wise away from the backbone and with practically all other bones removed. Fillets are soft-meated, so must be handled carefully. Before cooking trim off ragged edges and any bits of fin bone. Cut into serving pieces, if desired. Fillets may be sauteed, fried, baked, broiled, or boiled.

Some of the fish from which fillets may be cut are: bass, bluefish, cod, eel, flounder, haddock, hake, halibut, mackerel, perch, pickerel, pike, pompano, red snapper, salmon, smelt, trout, tuna, weakfish, and whitefish.

Fish steaks are slices through the entire body of the fish at right angles to its length. Steaks are usually cut from the larger-size fish, such as cod, halibut, swordfish, and sturgeon, and have about the same thickness as fillets.

"Pan-dressed" means that the whole fish has been eviscerated, and has had its scales removed. Sometimes this also includes the removal of the head, tail, and fins.

When you purchase a whole fish, Service fish cookery experts advise, your fish dealer generally cleans it for you and prepares it in one of the forms just mentioned. "If he fails to do this of his own initiative, you should request this cleaning, with due regard to the method of cooking you expect to follow. This complete cleaning of the fish as soon as it is removed from its icing not only helps to preserve it pending cooking, but also saves you an appreciable amount of time and work in the kitchen."

There are some people who hold back from a more frequent use of fish or seafoods because of the fear of and trouble experienced with small bones. Here's a tip: when buying round or dressed fish from your retailer, at the time of purchase, insist that no fins are to be sheared off even with the flesh surface. In cases where removal is desired, see that the dealer cuts deeply on each side of the fins, and pulls them out. This will remove the fin bones entirely.

By nature--according to species and to a lesser extent, according to season--some fish are fat and some are lean. Almost any variety of fish may be fried or broiled. Fat fish, however, are generally preferred for baking; while lean fish are ordinarily used for boiling, steaming, or for chowders.

When your favorite fish dealer cannot supply you with freshly caught fish of the species you desire, don't hesitate to purchase frozen stock of the same variety. Frozen fish can be prepared for table use in exactly the same manner as unfrozen fish, and is equally as delicious. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to distinguish between frozen and unfrozen fish after cooking, for flesh of the former is as firm, and tastes as sweet and full-flavored, as when freshly caught.

Frozen fish fillets need not be defrosted before cooking, but can be placed directly in the cooking utensil. A little longer time for cooking should be allowed, however.

If it is found necessary to keep frozen fish for a period of time before cooking, do not permit it to thaw. Wrap the fish in parchment paper and place in the freezing, or ice-cube compartment, of the home refrigerator at a temperature as comparable as possible to that of cold storage.

In addition to fish, many species of shellfish are frozen by any one of the varieties of quick-freezing methods which are in use. Shrimp, cooked or uncooked, however, is the most commonly frozen of the crustaceans.