

# Cooking Fish

## Keep Your Catch Cool, Then Freeze or Cook Soon

Fish flesh is sterile when it comes out of the water but it starts to go bad quickly, unless you take care of it. Preserve the quality of the fish you catch by keeping them alive or by keeping them cold. During cool months, live baskets, stringers or live wells will keep your fish alive until it's time to go home. When fishing in warmer months, bring along a cooler of ice to keep your catch in. Drain the cooler occasionally, so that dead fish do not soak in the water.

Use fish quickly. Refrigerated fish begin to lose their flavor after only 24 hours. Frozen fish start to deteriorate in quality after 2 to 4 months.



[Get Fish Recipes](#)

## Avoid Overcooking

Fresh fish tastes great, so cook your fish as soon after catching them as possible. Use simple recipes that let the fish's fresh flavor come through, and follow the recipes carefully to avoid overcooking.

Fish flesh is done when it becomes opaque and flakes easily. Test for doneness by probing the thickest portions with a fork. If the flesh flakes easily or separates from the bone, it is done. Further cooking will detract from its flavor and texture. A rule of thumb is ten minutes per inch of flesh cooked at medium heat.

---

## COOKING METHODS

---

### Panfrying

White-meat fish make excellent candidates for the frying pan. The oil keeps the flesh moist, and a coating keeps the meat's natural juices from cooking out.

Dust pan-dressed small fish or the fillets from larger fish in seasoned flour and place them in an open, heavy skillet in which about 1/4 inch of oil has been heated to almost "foaming." Don't crowd the fish or they will come out soggy. Cook each side over medium heat until brown. The flesh flakes easily when done.

For a thicker coating, dip fillets in milk or beaten egg and then coat them with crumbs, cornmeal or seasoned flour before cooking. Drain the pieces on paper towels before serving.

## Deep Frying

Use a thermometer to ensure your deep-frying oil is between 360 and 380F. You can deep fry in a skillet by using enough oil to completely submerge the fish.

- Dip the fish in batter and place them gently in the oil.
- Avoid overcrowding the fish.
- Cook from 2–5 minutes until brown.
- Dry on paper towels.
- Allow the oil to reheat between batches.

## Baking

Baking works well for large fish.

- Line a shallow baking dish with aluminum foil for easy removal of the fish.
- Baste the fish with a seasoned butter and lemon juice mixture.
- Cover the pan with aluminum foil or a lid and cook at 375F for 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fish.
- Test frequently to see if the fish is done.
- Baste the fish in its own juices during cooking for more flavor.
- Save the pan juices for soups or sauces.

## Broiling and Grilling

The high heat of broiling and grilling can dry fish flesh, unless the fish are basted often with sauce or oils.

Broil skin side up first, then turn it carefully. Thin fillets do not need turning. A small amount of liquid in the broiling pan will help keep the fish moist.

## Microwaving

- Place fish in a dish or on a plate with the thickest portions to the outside.
- Brush fish with butter/lemon mixture and cover with waxed paper.
- If fish "pops," cook at a lower setting.
- Check for doneness frequently.
- Add liquid and seasonings and cover dish with plastic wrap to poach or steam fish.

---

## COOKING METHODS BY FISH TYPE

---

| Type     | Pan Fry   | Deep Fry  | Bake      | Broil     | Grill |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| Sunfish  | Excellent | Excellent | Good      |           |       |
| Bluegill | Excellent | Excellent | Good      |           |       |
| Catfish  | Good      | Excellent | Good      | Good      |       |
| Bass     | Excellent | Good      | Good      |           |       |
| Trout    | Good      | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent | Good  |
| Walleye  | Excellent | Excellent | Excellent | Good      |       |
| Carp     | Good      | Excellent |           |           |       |
| Sucker   | Good      | Excellent |           |           |       |