

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

8 Chapters

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Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 1 · Know Your Fish

SKILL GOAL

Buy fresh fish, store it safely, prepare it and tell when it is cooked.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Fish splits into a few groups with different tastes and textures. **White fish** (cod, haddock, pollock, hake) is mild, lean and flaky. **Oily fish** (salmon, mackerel, sardines, trout) has richer, stronger flesh full of healthy oils and is harder to overcook. **Flat fish** (plaice, sole, halibut) is thin, delicate and quick. **Shellfish** is covered in chapter 6. Fish is lean and has very little connective tissue, which is why it cooks in minutes and dries out as fast.

Fresh fish should smell of the sea, not of ammonia or "fishiness". Look for **bright, clear eyes, shiny skin, firm flesh that springs back when pressed** and red gills; fillets should be glossy and moist, not dull, gaping or brown at the edges. Frozen fish is often frozen within hours of being caught, so it can be fresher than fish on ice that has travelled for days. Look for the **MSC** (wild) or **ASC** (farmed) label, and ask at the counter about where the fish is from. Knife work for fish is in Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1.



Figure 1. Four groups: white, oily, flat and shellfish. Each cooks a little differently.

The method

- **Buy it last and cook it soon.** Take it home in a cool bag, and cook fresh fish the same day or the next.
- **Store it at the bottom of the fridge** (0 to 4°C), loosely wrapped on a plate, for no more than a day or two.
- **Check for pin bones** by running a finger down the middle of the fillet, and pull out any with clean tweezers.
- **Pat it dry** with kitchen paper before cooking, because wet fish steams instead of browning.
- **Cook until just opaque,** then rest it for a minute; it keeps cooking off the heat.

GROUP	EXAMPLES	FLAVOUR AND TEXTURE	COOK IT BY
White fish	Cod, haddock, pollock, hake	Mild, lean, large flakes	Frying, baking, poaching, battering
Oily fish	Salmon, mackerel, sardines	Rich, firm, strong	Frying, grilling, roasting, smoking
Flat fish	Plaice, sole, halibut	Delicate, thin	Quick frying, grilling
Smoked fish	Haddock, mackerel, salmon	Salty, smoky	Poaching, flaking, pâté

RAW FISH, BONES, ALLERGENS AND SMELL

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

Smell and cooking fish: fish smells strongest when it is old, so buy it fresh and cook it the day you buy it. Use the extractor fan and open a window, wrap trimmings tightly before binning them, and wash pans straight away in hot, soapy water.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A salt-and-lemon seared fillet

15 minutes | 2 portions | a dry fish, a hot pan and not fiddling

The simplest way to cook a fillet and to taste fish as it is. Pat it very dry, season just before it goes in the pan, and leave it alone. Lemon at the end brightens everything. Pan-frying is covered in more detail in chapter 2.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	skin-on white fish fillets (about 150 g each), pin-boned
½ tsp	flaked sea salt
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
10 g	butter
1	lemon, cut in wedges

1. Pat the fish very dry with kitchen paper and season both sides with salt. Heat the oil in a non-stick pan over a medium-high heat until it shimmers.
2. Lay the fish skin side down, pressing gently with a fish slice for 10 seconds, and cook **3 to 4 minutes** without moving it, until the flesh has turned opaque two-thirds of the way up.
3. Turn, add the butter and cook for 1 to 2 minutes more. Serve at once with lemon wedges.

> **HOT PAN, RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot pan and hot oil:** frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.
>
> **Raw fish:** keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.
>
> **Is it cooked?:** fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

> **Allergens:** fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 1 · BAKED

Baked fish fingers

35 minutes | 4 portions | a three-stage coating and a hot tray

Home-made fish fingers are crisper and tastier than shop-bought, and baking is easier and safer than frying. Preheat the tray so the underside crisps. Serve with peas, chips or bread and tartare sauce (mayonnaise is in Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 7).

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

400 g	skinless, boneless white fish fillets
50 g	plain flour
1	egg, beaten
100 g	panko or fresh white breadcrumbs
2 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
½ tsp	flaked sea salt

1. Heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan, gas 7) with a baking tray inside. Cut the fish into 8 fingers about 2 cm thick and 8 cm long and pat dry.
2. Roll each finger in flour (shake off the extra), then the egg, then the breadcrumbs mixed with the oil and salt, pressing the crumbs on.
3. Lay on the hot tray and bake for **12 to 15 minutes,** turning once, until golden and the fish is cooked through.

RAW FISH, HOT OVEN AND ALLERGENS

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

> **Allergens:** contains fish, gluten and egg.

LEVEL 2 · NO COOKING

Sardines on toast

10 minutes | 2 portions | working with tinned fish

Tinned sardines in olive oil are cheap, rich in oils and ready to eat. The skill is balance: oily fish needs something sharp and fresh. Mash them roughly with lemon, pile on toast and add tomato and parsley.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	tin of sardines in olive oil (about 120 g), drained
2	thick slices of bread, toasted
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1	tomato, sliced
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	black pepper

1. Mash the sardines roughly with the lemon juice and pepper, leaving some texture. Remove any large bones if you prefer.
2. Toast the bread, top with tomato slices and pile on the sardines.
3. Scatter with parsley and eat straight away.

BONES AND ALLERGENS

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin,

> and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

LEVEL 3 · SMOKED

Smoked mackerel pâté

15 minutes plus chilling | 4 portions | blending a smoked fish

Smoked mackerel is already cooked, so this needs no heat. Remove the skin and any bones, then blend with cream cheese and lemon. Serve cold on toast or with crackers and cucumber.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

200 g	smoked mackerel fillets, skin and bones removed
100 g	full-fat cream cheese
2 tbsp	crème fraîche
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tsp	creamed horseradish (optional)
1 pinch	black pepper

1. Flake the mackerel into a bowl and check carefully for bones.
2. Mash with the cream cheese, crème fraîche, lemon juice, horseradish and pepper, or pulse in a food processor, until almost smooth.
3. Taste (smoked fish is salty, so it may need no salt), spoon into a dish, and chill for **1 hour.** Eat within 2 days.

SMOKED FISH, BONES AND ALLERGENS

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> **Leftover fish:** cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Fresh against frozen

Quality.

1. Cook a fresh fillet and a defrosted frozen fillet of the same fish exactly the same way.

Look for: Good frozen fish is often almost the same, sometimes better than fish left on ice for days. Defrost in the fridge overnight and pat very dry.

EXPERIMENT

Salting 15 minutes first

Firmness.

1. Salt one fillet and leave it for 15 minutes before cooking; salt another just before cooking.

Look for: The early-salted fillet is firmer and seasoned deeper, with a little less water. Dry it well afterwards.

EXPERIMENT

Skin on or off

Crispness and moisture.

1. Pan-fry a skin-on fillet and a skinless one, skin side down first.

Look for: The skin protects the flesh and crisps into a delicious layer; the skinless one cooks faster and can stick.

EXPERIMENT

Checking by sight and thermometer

Doneness.

1. Cook a thick fillet and check it at 3, 4 and 5 minutes with a fork and a probe thermometer.

Look for: Opaque and flaking arrives at about 60 to 63°C. Past 70°C it is dry. You will learn the look.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Seared fillet				
Baked fish fingers				
Sardines on toast				
Smoked mackerel pâté				
Fresh against frozen				
Salting 15 minutes first				
Skin on or off				
Checking by sight and thermometer				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish smells strongly of ammonia	Old fish	Don't eat it; buy fresher fish
Fish sticks to the pan	Pan not hot, wet fish or moved too soon	Dry the fish, heat the pan, and leave it until it releases

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dry, chalky fish	Overcooked	Cook until just opaque; rest briefly
Fish falls apart	Handled too much or overcooked	Use a wide fish slice and turn once
Soggy coating	Fish not dried or tray not hot	Pat dry and preheat the tray
Pâté bitter or very salty	Smoked fish very salty	Add more cream cheese or lemon; skip salt

RAW FISH, LEFTOVERS AND ALLERGENS

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can tell fresh fish from old.
- ☐ I can store fish safely and cook it soon.
- ☐ I can check for pin bones and pat fish dry.
- ☐ I can tell when fish is cooked through.
- ☐ I know the main groups of fish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 2 is Pan-Frying Fish: a dry fish, a hot pan and not moving it.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 2 · Pan-Frying Fish

SKILL GOAL

Pan-fry a fillet with crisp skin, juicy flesh and no sticking.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Pan-frying is the fastest, tastiest way to cook a fillet, and the one most people get wrong. Three things matter. The fish must be **very dry**, because water in the pan makes steam and stops browning. The pan must be **hot enough** that the fish sizzles at once. And you must **leave it alone**: skin that is moved too soon tears and sticks, but skin left for a few minutes releases by itself and is crisp.

Cook most of the way on the skin side, then turn briefly. A thin fillet cooks in 3 to 4 minutes in all, a thick one in 6 to 8. Watch the **colour change** as the flesh turns opaque, climbing up the side of the fillet from the pan; when it is about two-thirds of the way up, turn it. A sauce of lemon and butter is in Cooking Skills: Sauces 1, chapter 6. For frying chips to go with fish see Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 4.



Figure 2. Five steps to crisp skin: dry, season, heat, skin down, turn once.

The method

- **Pat the fillets very dry,** especially the skin, and score thick skin lightly so it does not curl.

- **Heat a non-stick pan** over a medium-high heat with a thin layer of oil until it shimmers.
- **Season and lay the fish away from you,** skin side down, pressing gently with a fish slice for 10 seconds to stop it curling.
- **Cook without moving it** until the flesh is opaque two-thirds of the way up the side.
- **Turn once,** add butter if you like, cook 1 to 2 minutes, then rest on a warm plate.

FISH	THICKNESS	SKIN-SIDE TIME (APPROXIMATE)	OTHER SIDE
Plaice (flat)	About 1 cm	2 minutes	1 minute
Sea bass	About 2 cm	3 to 4 minutes	1 minute
Salmon	About 3 cm	4 to 5 minutes	2 to 3 minutes
Mackerel	About 2 cm	3 minutes	1 to 2 minutes

HOT PAN, HOT OIL AND BONES

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Pan-fried sea bass with crisp skin

15 minutes | 2 portions | crisping skin without sticking

Sea bass has thin skin that crisps beautifully. Make sure the fillets are completely dry. A thin fillet needs no turning at all if you spoon hot oil over the top for the last minute.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	skin-on sea bass fillets (about 120 g each)
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
½ tsp	flaked sea salt
1	lemon, cut in wedges

1. Pat the fillets dry. Heat the oil in a non-stick pan until it shimmers, season the fish and lay it skin side down away from you.
2. Press for 10 seconds, then leave for **3 to 4 minutes** until the skin is crisp and the flesh is opaque two-thirds of the way up.
3. Turn and cook for 30 seconds, or spoon the oil over for 1 minute. Serve skin side up, with lemon.

HOT PAN, RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

LEVEL 2 · RICH

Crispy-skin salmon

15 minutes | 2 portions | cooking a thicker oily fillet

Salmon is forgiving: it stays moist even a little past done. Start skin side down in a hot pan, cook most of the way through on that side, then flip for the last minutes. Salmon is traditionally eaten slightly translucent at the very centre; to be safe, cook it until it just flakes.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	skin-on salmon fillets (about 150 g each), pin-boned
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
½ tsp	flaked sea salt
1 tbsp	butter
1 tsp	lemon juice

1. Pat the salmon very dry and season. Heat the oil until it shimmers and lay the fish skin side down, pressing for 10 seconds.
2. Cook for **4 to 5 minutes** without moving it, until the flesh is opaque most of the way up. Turn and cook 2 to 3 minutes more.
3. Add the butter and lemon juice to the pan, spoon over the fish and rest for 2 minutes.

HOT PAN, RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

> **Smoked and oily fish for some people:** pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

LEVEL 2 · MEUNIÈRE

Plaice meunière (no wine)

15 minutes | 2 portions | a light flour coat and a browned butter sauce

Meunière means "miller's wife": the fish is dusted with flour, fried in butter and served with the browned butter, lemon and parsley. Flat fish are delicate, so cook quickly and turn once. There is no wine; lemon does the work.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	plaice fillets (about 150 g each)
2 tbsp	plain flour, seasoned with salt and pepper
40 g	butter
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
1	lemon, juiced
1 tbsp	capers, rinsed
1 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Pat the fish dry and dust lightly with the seasoned flour, shaking off the excess. Heat the oil and half the butter until foaming.
2. Fry the fillets for **2 minutes** on the first side until golden, turn and cook for 1 minute. Lift onto warm plates.
3. Add the remaining butter to the pan; when it turns nutty brown, add the lemon juice, capers and parsley and pour over the fish.

HOT PAN, HOT BUTTER AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

> **Allergens:** contains fish, gluten and milk.

LEVEL 3 · STRONG

Mackerel with mustard and a tomato salad

20 minutes | 2 portions | cooking a strongly flavoured oily fish

Mackerel is oily, strong and needs something sharp. Brush mustard on the flesh side only, not the skin, which would burn. The skin crisps beautifully if the fillet is dry and the pan hot. Serve with a quick tomato and red onion salad.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	mackerel fillets, skin on
2 tsp	wholegrain mustard
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
200 g	cherry tomatoes, halved
½	small red onion, thinly sliced
1 tbsp	lemon juice
1 tbsp	olive oil

1. Toss the tomatoes and onion with the lemon juice, olive oil and a pinch of salt and leave for 10 minutes.
2. Pat the mackerel dry and brush the flesh side with mustard. Heat the oil and lay the fillets skin side down, pressing for 10 seconds.
3. Cook for **3 minutes** until the skin is crisp, turn for 1 to 2 minutes, and serve on the salad.

HOT PAN, BONES AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and

people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Allergens: contains fish and mustard.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Dry or wet skin

Crispness.

1. Pat one fillet very dry and leave another damp, then fry both identically.

Look for: The dry skin crisps and releases; the damp one steams, sticks and goes soft. Dry is the first rule of crisp skin.

EXPERIMENT

Cold or hot pan

Sticking.

1. Lay one fillet in a cold pan and heat it up, and one in a hot pan.

Look for: The cold-start fillet sticks and cooks unevenly; the hot-pan fillet sizzles at once and releases when ready.

EXPERIMENT

Pressing the fillet

Curling.

1. Cook one fillet pressed flat for 10 seconds and one left alone.

Look for: The unpressed fillet curls, leaving the middle of the skin raw; pressing keeps the whole skin on the pan.

EXPERIMENT

Butter at the start or the end

Burning.

1. Fry one fillet in butter from the start and one in oil, adding butter at the end.

Look for: Butter from the start browns and burns; oil first with butter added at the end gives the nutty flavour without burning.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Pan-fried sea bass				
Crispy-skin salmon				
Plaice meunière				
Mackerel with mustard				
Dry or wet skin				
Cold or hot pan				
Pressing the fillet				
Butter at the start or the end				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Skin sticks to the pan	Wet fish, cold pan or moved too soon	Dry the fish, heat the pan, and wait until it releases
Fillet curls up	Skin shrinks	Press for 10 seconds; score thick skin

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pale, soggy skin	Pan not hot or fish wet	Hotter pan, drier fish
Dry fish	Overcooked	Take it off a minute early and rest
Burnt butter	Added too early or heat too high	Add the butter at the end over a lower heat
Fish breaks when turned	Turned too early or wrong tool	Wait until it releases; use a wide, flexible fish slice

HOT PAN, RAW FISH AND LEFTOVERS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can pat fish dry and season it just before cooking.

☐ I can heat a pan until the oil shimmers.

☐ I can leave skin alone until it releases.

☐ I can turn fish once without breaking it.

☐ I can make a quick lemon and butter finish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 3 is Baking and Roasting Fish: foil parcels, open trays and crumb toppings.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 3 · Baking and Roasting Fish

SKILL GOAL

Bake fish in the oven so it stays moist, with a tray, a parcel or a crumb crust.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Baking is the easiest way to cook fish for a crowd or while you do something else. Dry oven heat can also dry fish out quickly, so every method here protects the fish in some way: a **foil parcel** traps steam and cooks the fish in its own juices; a **crumb topping** shields the top and adds crunch; and a **bed of vegetables** keeps the underside moist. A fillet about 2.5 cm thick is done in 12 to 15 minutes at 200°C; thin fillets are done in under 10.

Fish keeps cooking as it rests, so take it out when the thickest part has just turned opaque. A lower oven (120°C) cooks gently and gives a very tender, forgiving result, though without browning. Vegetables that take longer than the fish, such as potatoes, need a head start; see Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 3 for roasting them. Fish pie, which is also baked, is in chapter 5.



Figure 3. Four ways to bake fish: open, parcel, crumb and low-and-slow.

The method

- **Heat the oven fully** before the fish goes in; a preheated tray also helps the underside cook.

- **Pat the fish dry,** season it and brush or drizzle with oil or butter so it does not dry.
- **Give slow vegetables a head start** so everything is ready together.
- **Check at the minimum time:** the thickest part should flake and have no glassy centre.
- **Rest for 2 minutes** before serving; it keeps cooking and the juices settle.

METHOD	OVEN (APPROXIMATE)	TIME	RESULT
Open tray	200°C (180°C fan, gas 6)	12 to 15 minutes	Lightly browned, firm
Foil parcel	200°C (180°C fan, gas 6)	15 to 20 minutes	Soft, steamed, flavoured
Crumb top	200°C (180°C fan, gas 6)	15 minutes	Crisp top, moist inside
Low and slow	120°C (100°C fan, gas ½)	20 to 25 minutes	Very tender, silky

HOT OVEN, HOT STEAM FROM PARCELS AND RAW FISH

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Steam from a parcel: a foil parcel holds scalding steam. Open it away from your face, slitting the top with a knife and letting the steam escape before you peel it back.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A salmon traybake

45 minutes | 2 portions | timing fish and vegetables together on one tray

The classic one-tray supper. Potatoes need 25 minutes, broccoli 10 and salmon 12 to 15, so they go in at different times. Lemon and olive oil are all the seasoning it needs.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	baby new potatoes, halved
2 tbsp	olive oil
2	salmon fillets (about 150 g each), skin on
150 g	broccoli, in florets
1	lemon, half sliced, half cut in wedges
½ tsp	flaked sea salt

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Toss the potatoes with half the oil and the salt on a large tray and roast for **15 minutes.**
2. Add the broccoli and the salmon (skin side down) to the tray, drizzle with the rest of the oil and lay the lemon slices on top. Roast for 12 to 15 minutes more.
3. The salmon is done when it flakes in the thickest part. Rest for 2 minutes and serve with lemon wedges.

HOT OVEN, HOT TRAY AND ALLERGENS

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

> **Allergens:** fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 2 · PARCEL

Cod in a foil parcel

30 minutes | 2 portions | sealing a parcel so fish steams in its own juices

Fish, vegetables and flavourings wrapped in foil steam in their own juices, and the parcel makes its own sauce. Make sure the foil is sealed all round or the steam escapes. Open it carefully at the table.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	cod fillets (about 150 g each)
150 g	cherry tomatoes, halved
1	courgette, in thin ribbons
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	lemon, 4 slices
4	sprigs of thyme
½ tsp	flaked sea salt

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Tear 2 large sheets of foil and brush the centre with oil. Pile courgette and tomatoes in the middle of each.
2. Lay a fillet on each, season, top with lemon slices and thyme, drizzle with oil, and fold the foil over to make a sealed parcel.
3. Bake on a tray for **15 to 18 minutes.** Open carefully (steam!), check the fish flakes, and serve with the juices.

HOT PARCEL, STEAM AND ALLERGENS

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with

a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 2 · CRISP

Crumb-topped haddock

30 minutes | 2 portions | a crisp protective crust

A layer of mustard glues on a herby crumb that bakes into a crisp lid, protecting the fish underneath. Use fresh breadcrumbs for the best crunch, and drizzle with oil so they brown.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	haddock fillets (about 150 g each), skinned
2 tsp	Dijon mustard
50 g	fresh breadcrumbs
2 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, zest and wedges
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 pinch	flaked sea salt

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Mix the breadcrumbs, parsley, lemon zest, salt and 1 tbsp of the oil.
2. Place the fillets on an oiled tray, brush the tops with mustard and press the crumbs on firmly.
3. Drizzle with the remaining oil and bake for **12 to 15 minutes** until the crumbs are golden and the fish flakes. Serve with lemon wedges.

> **HOT OVEN AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot oven and hot trays:** ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.
>
> **Raw fish:** keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.
>
> **Is it cooked?:** fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off

the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: contains fish, gluten and mustard.

LEVEL 3 · ROAST

Mackerel with roast potatoes and tomatoes

55 minutes | 2 portions | roasting oily fish over a base

Mackerel is oily and strong, and goes well with sweet roasted tomatoes and crisp potatoes. The fish goes in last, because it cooks in 10 to 12 minutes. The oils run into the potatoes below.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

400 g	waxy potatoes, in 2 cm chunks
2 tbsp	olive oil
200 g	cherry tomatoes
2	mackerel fillets, skin on
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, in wedges
½ tsp	flaked sea salt

1. Heat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan, gas 7). Toss the potatoes with the oil and salt on a large tray and roast for **30 minutes** until golden.
2. Add the tomatoes and lay the mackerel fillets on top, skin side up. Roast for 10 to 12 minutes more until the skin is blistered and the fish flakes.
3. Scatter with parsley, and serve with lemon wedges.

HOT OVEN, BONES AND ALLERGENS

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin,

and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Parcel or open tray

Texture.

1. Bake two cod fillets, one in a sealed foil parcel and one on an open tray, for the same time.

Look for: The parcel is soft and steamed with a lot of juice; the open fillet is firmer and slightly browned. Choose by what you want.

EXPERIMENT

High oven or low

Tenderness.

1. Bake two pieces of salmon, one at 200°C for 12 minutes and one at 120°C for 22 minutes.

Look for: The low oven gives silky, even flesh with no browning; the high one is firmer and browned at the edges.

EXPERIMENT

Resting

Juices.

1. Cut one fillet straight from the oven and rest another for 2 minutes.

Look for: The rested one finishes cooking and holds its juice; the other loses moisture and looks glassy at the centre.

EXPERIMENT

Thick or thin fillet

Timing.

1. Bake a thin and a thick piece of the same fish together and check them every 2 minutes.

Look for: The thin piece is done long before the thick. Always cook equal thicknesses together.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Salmon traybake				
Cod in a foil parcel				
Crumb-topped haddock				
Mackerel with potatoes				
Parcel or open tray				
High oven or low				
Resting				
Thick or thin fillet				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dry fish	Overbaked or oven too hot	Check early; use a parcel or lower oven
Soggy crumb	Crumbs not oiled or fish wet	Pat the fish dry; toss crumbs in oil; bake hot
Raw in the middle	Fish too thick or cold from the fridge	Bake longer; let the fish stand for 10 minutes first
Potatoes undercooked	Not given a head start	Roast them for 15 to 30 minutes before adding fish
Parcel leaks	Foil not sealed	Fold the edges twice and press
Fish sticks to the tray	Tray not oiled	Line with parchment or oil it

HOT OVEN, HOT STEAM AND LEFTOVERS

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can time vegetables and fish on one tray.

☐ I can seal and open a foil parcel safely.

☐ I can make a crisp crumb topping.

☐ I can tell when baked fish is done.

☐ I know to rest fish before serving.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 4 is Poaching and Steaming: cooking fish gently in liquid.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 4 · Poaching and Steaming

SKILL GOAL

Cook fish gently in liquid or steam so it stays tender and moist.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Poaching means cooking food gently in liquid that is hot but never boiling, about 80 to 85°C, when the surface barely shivers and tiny bubbles rise. Boiling would toughen the fish and break it up. Poaching is gentle, needs no fat and keeps fish tender. The liquid adds flavour, and the cooking liquid becomes a sauce, so use milk for smoked fish and a seasoned water called a **court bouillon** (water with lemon, bay and peppercorns) for salmon. No wine is needed.

Steaming is similar: the fish sits on a plate above simmering water and cooks in the moist heat. It suits thin, delicate fillets, which a Chinese-style dressing of ginger and spring onion lifts. Both methods leave fish pale and moist rather than browned. A white sauce made with the poaching milk is in Cooking Skills: Sauces 1, chapter 2; poached eggs for the haddock are in Cooking Skills: Eggs 1, chapter 5.

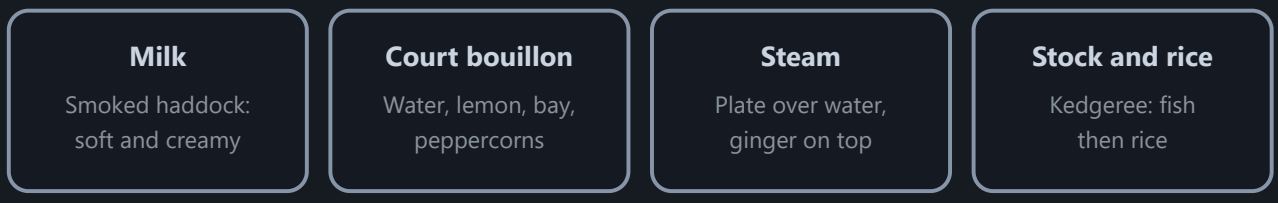


Figure 4. Four gentle methods: milk, court bouillon, steam and a rice dish.

The method

- **Choose a pan that fits the fish snugly,** so you use less liquid and the fish stays covered.

- **Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer,** slide the fish in, cover, and turn the heat down so it barely moves.
- **Cook for 6 to 10 minutes,** depending on thickness, until opaque and flaking.
- **Lift out with a slotted fish slice,** and keep the liquid for a sauce.
- **For steaming, set a heatproof plate on a rack above boiling water,** cover tightly and keep the water at a steady simmer.

METHOD	LIQUID	TEMPERATURE	TIME (APPROXIMATE)
Poached smoked haddock	Milk	Just below a simmer	8 to 10 minutes
Poached salmon	Court bouillon	Barely a shiver	8 to 10 minutes, then cool in liquid
Steamed fish	Steam	Steady simmer below	8 to 10 minutes
Kedgeree	Water and spice, then rice	Simmer	30 minutes in all

HOT LIQUID, STEAM AND SMOKED FISH

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Steam: steam burns faster than boiling water. Lift the lid away from your face, use oven gloves, and take the plate out with a cloth or a tongs-style plate lifter.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Smoked haddock poached in milk

20 minutes | 2 portions | poaching gently and saving the liquid

Undyed smoked haddock poached in milk is a gentle, classic breakfast or supper. Serve it with mash (Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 2) and a poached egg on top. Strain the milk and use it to make parsley sauce.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	undyed smoked haddock fillets (about 150 g each)
300 ml	whole milk
1	bay leaf
4	black peppercorns
2	eggs, poached (optional)
1 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Put the milk, bay leaf and peppercorns in a pan just big enough for the fish and bring to a gentle simmer.
2. Slide the haddock in, skin side down, cover, and cook on the lowest heat for **8 to 10 minutes** until the fish flakes.
3. Lift out with a slotted spoon, remove the skin, and serve with a poached egg and parsley. Keep the milk for a sauce.

HOT MILK, SMOKED FISH AND ALLERGENS

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off

the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: contains fish, milk and egg.

LEVEL 2 · COLD

Poached salmon with a dill yogurt sauce

25 minutes plus cooling | 4 portions | poaching in a seasoned liquid and cooling in it

Salmon poached in a flavoured liquid is moist, even and serves hot or cold. Letting it cool in the liquid keeps it tender. Serve with a cool dill yogurt sauce, new potatoes and cucumber.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4	salmon fillets (about 150 g each)
750 ml	water
1	lemon, sliced
2	bay leaves
6	black peppercorns
1 tsp	salt
150 g	natural yogurt
2 tbsp	chopped fresh dill
1 tsp	lemon juice

1. Bring the water, lemon, bay, peppercorns and salt to a simmer for 5 minutes. Mix the yogurt, dill and lemon juice for the sauce.
2. Lower the salmon in, make sure it is just covered, and keep the liquid barely moving for **8 to 10 minutes** until the fish just flakes.
3. Lift out with a fish slice. Serve warm, or leave to cool in the liquid for 20 minutes and serve cold with the dill yogurt.

> **HOT LIQUID AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot liquid and steam:** hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.
>
> **Is it cooked?:** fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off

the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: contains fish and milk.

LEVEL 2 · STEAMED

Ginger and spring onion steamed fish

20 minutes | 2 portions | steaming over water and dressing with hot oil

A light, fragrant dish that takes minutes. A thin, white fillet steams in 8 to 10 minutes; hot oil poured over spring onions and ginger at the end releases their aroma. Take great care with the hot oil.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	white fish fillets (cod or sea bass), about 150 g each
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
3	spring onions, finely sliced
2 tbsp	soy sauce
1 tsp	toasted sesame oil
2 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil

1. Put the fish on a heatproof plate, scatter half the ginger and spring onion over it, and steam over simmering water, covered, for **8 to 10 minutes** until it flakes.
2. Lift the plate out carefully, pour away the milky juices, and scatter on the remaining ginger and spring onion.
3. Heat the oil until just smoking, pour it over the topping so it sizzles, then add the soy sauce and sesame oil.

STEAM, HOT OIL AND ALLERGENS

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Hot oil: pouring smoking-hot oil over wet ingredients causes spitting. Do it slowly from a small pan, stand back and keep your face away.

Allergens: contains fish, soy and sesame.

LEVEL 3 · SUPPER

Kedgeree

40 minutes | 4 portions | combining poached fish, rice and eggs

A Victorian breakfast that makes an excellent supper: poached smoked haddock, curried rice, eggs and parsley. Poach the fish first, then cook the rice in the same flavoured liquid. Rice cooking is in Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 5, and boiled eggs in Cooking Skills: Eggs 1, chapter 2.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

400 g	undyed smoked haddock fillets
500 ml	water
1	bay leaf
30 g	butter
1	onion, finely chopped
2 tsp	mild curry powder
200 g	basmati rice, rinsed
100 g	frozen peas
3	hard-boiled eggs, quartered
2 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Poach the haddock in the water with the bay leaf for **8 minutes,** lift out, flake the fish and keep the liquid.
2. Soften the onion in the butter for 5 minutes, add the curry powder for 1 minute, then the rice, and 400 ml of the strained poaching liquid. Cover and cook for 10 minutes on low.
3. Stir in the peas for 3 minutes, fold in the fish, eggs and parsley, and serve with lemon wedges.

> **HOT PAN, SMOKED FISH AND ALLERGENS**

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Allergens: contains fish, egg, milk and mustard (some curry powders).

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Milk or water

Flavour.

1. Poach two pieces of smoked haddock, one in milk and one in water.

Look for: The milk softens the salty smokiness and makes a creamy liquid for a sauce; the water version is saltier and sharper.

EXPERIMENT

Simmering or bubbling

Texture.

1. Cook two salmon fillets, one in barely moving liquid and one in a rolling simmer.

Look for: The gentle one stays silky; the bubbling one is firmer, breaks up and leaves white protein on the surface.

EXPERIMENT

Cooling in the liquid

Moisture.

1. Lift one poached fillet out and leave another to cool in the liquid.

Look for: The one left in the liquid stays moister; the one removed dries on the surface.

EXPERIMENT

Steamed or poached

Flavour and texture.

1. Cook a white fillet by steaming and another by poaching in water.

Look for: The steamed fish keeps more of its own flavour; the poached one is a little softer and can lose flavour into the liquid.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Haddock poached in milk				
Poached salmon				
Steamed ginger fish				
Kedgeree				
Milk or water				
Simmering or bubbling				
Cooling in the liquid				
Steamed or poached				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish falls apart	Liquid boiling or fish handled too much	Keep the liquid below a simmer; use a fish slice
Tough, dry fish	Overcooked	Take it off a minute early and rest
Bland poached fish	Liquid unseasoned	Season the liquid; add lemon, bay and pepper
Milky white scum on salmon	Boiled or cooked too hot	Keep it barely moving; wipe off the white protein
Kedgeree stodgy	Too much liquid	Measure carefully; rinse the rice first
Hot oil spits	Oil too hot or topping wet	Pat the topping dry and pour slowly

HOT LIQUID, STEAM AND LEFTOVERS

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can poach fish in barely moving liquid.

☐ I can make a court bouillon.

☐ I can steam fish over water safely.

☐ I can make kedgeree from poached fish.

☐ I can use the poaching liquid as a sauce.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 5 is Fish Cakes, Pies and Coatings: binding, coating and topping.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 5 · Fish Cakes, Pies and Coatings

SKILL GOAL

Bind, coat and top fish so it makes comfortable family meals.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Some of the best fish meals use fish as part of a dish rather than as a fillet on a plate. **Fish cakes** bind flaked fish with mashed potato and shape it into patties, then coat and fry or bake. A **coating** of flour, egg and breadcrumbs protects the fish from the hot pan and gives crunch. A **fish pie** combines mixed fish in a creamy sauce under mashed potato, a family favourite for a reason: it forgives small timing mistakes, and it uses cheaper fish well.

The key rules are the same as for pies in Cooking Skills: Pastry 1, chapter 4: cool the filling before topping, and keep it **thick**, because fish gives off liquid. Use a mix of fish (white, smoked and a little salmon) for the best flavour. For mash see Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 2, for white sauce Cooking Skills: Sauces 1, chapter 2, and for boiled eggs Cooking Skills: Eggs 1, chapter 2.



Figure 5. A fish pie in layers: mash, sauce, fish and a buttered dish.

The method

- **Use cold, dry mashed potato** for fish cakes (hot or wet mash makes them fall apart).
- **Poach or bake the fish first,** flake it, and check for bones and skin.

- **Chill shaped cakes for 30 minutes** so they hold together in the pan.
- **Coat in three stages:** flour, beaten egg, then crumbs, pressing the crumbs on gently.
- **Keep a pie filling thick and cool** before the mash goes on, or the topping sinks.

DISH	FISH	BINDER OR SAUCE	COOKING (APPROXIMATE)
Fish cakes	Cooked flaked fish	Cold mash	Shallow-fry 4 minutes a side
Breadcrumbed fillet	Plaice or cod	Flour, egg, crumbs	Shallow-fry 2 to 3 minutes a side
Fish pie	Mixed fish	White sauce	Bake 30 to 35 minutes
Haddock and leek pie	Smoked haddock	Creamy leek sauce, puff lid	Bake 25 to 30 minutes

HOT OIL, HOT OVEN AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Fish cakes

50 minutes plus chilling | 4 portions (8 cakes) | binding with cold mash and coating

A way to use up leftover cooked fish or mash. Salmon and white fish together work well. Chill the shaped cakes so they hold, and fry gently so the centre heats through before the outside burns.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

400 g	cooked, flaked fish (salmon, cod or a mix)
300 g	cold, dry mashed potato
2 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, zest and juice
50 g	plain flour, seasoned
1	egg, beaten
80 g	fresh breadcrumbs or panko
3 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil

1. Gently mix the fish, mash, parsley, lemon zest and juice, season, and shape into 8 patties 2 cm thick. Chill for **30 minutes.**
2. Coat each in flour, then egg, then breadcrumbs.
3. Fry in the hot oil over a medium heat for **4 minutes a side** until golden and hot in the centre.

> **HOT OIL, RAW EGG AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot pan and hot oil:** frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.
>
> **Allergens:** fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

> **Allergens:** contains fish, gluten and egg.

LEVEL 2 · CRISP

A breadcrumb-coated fillet

25 minutes | 2 portions | the three-stage coating and shallow frying

Plaice or cod in a golden crumb, fried in a shallow layer of oil. Use one hand for dry coating and one for wet to avoid clumpy fingers. Rest the coated fish for 5 minutes so the crumbs stick. Serve with lemon and a mayonnaise from Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 7.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	plaice or cod fillets (about 150 g each), skinned
3 tbsp	plain flour, seasoned
1	egg, beaten
60 g	panko or fresh white breadcrumbs
4 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Pat the fish dry. Coat in flour, shaking off the excess, then egg, then breadcrumbs, pressing on gently. Rest for 5 minutes.
2. Heat the oil to a depth of 1 cm in a frying pan over a medium-high heat until a crumb sizzles at once.
3. Fry for **2 to 3 minutes a side** until golden and cooked through. Drain on kitchen paper and serve with lemon.

HOT OIL AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

> **Allergens:** contains fish, gluten and egg.

LEVEL 2 · FAMILY

A fish pie

1 hour 15 minutes | 4 portions | building a pie in layers with a thick sauce

The nation's favourite supper. Poach the fish in the milk, use the milk for the sauce and keep the filling thick. Boiled egg and peas are traditional. Cool the filling a little before adding the mash.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

300 g	undyed smoked haddock
300 g	cod or pollock
200 g	salmon
500 ml	whole milk
40 g	butter
40 g	plain flour
100 g	frozen peas
3	hard-boiled eggs, quartered
2 tbsp	chopped parsley
900 g	floury potatoes, peeled
50 g	butter, for the mash
3 tbsp	milk, for the mash

1. Poach the fish in the milk for **6 to 8 minutes,** lift out and flake it, discarding skin and bones. Strain and keep the milk. Boil the potatoes for 20 minutes, drain and mash with butter and milk.
2. Make a thick white sauce with the 40 g butter, flour and the poaching milk, simmering for 5 minutes; stir in the peas and parsley, then fold in the fish and eggs gently. Cool for 10 minutes.
3. Spoon into a dish, top with mash, rough up with a fork, and bake at 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6) for **30 to 35 minutes** until golden and bubbling.

HOT MILK, HOT OVEN AND ALLERGENS

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Allergens: contains fish, milk, gluten and egg.

LEVEL 3 · PASTRY LID

A smoked haddock and leek pie

1 hour | 4 portions | a creamy filling under a puff lid

A pie with a ready-made puff lid (see Cooking Skills: Pastry 1, chapter 6): quicker than mash, and the smoky fish pairs well with soft leeks. Cool the filling completely before adding the lid, and brush the top only with egg.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

500 g	undyed smoked haddock
400 ml	whole milk
30 g	butter
2	leeks, sliced
30 g	plain flour
3 tbsp	double cream
1 tsp	wholegrain mustard
1	sheet of ready-rolled puff pastry (320 g)
1	egg, beaten

1. Poach the haddock in the milk for 8 minutes, flake it (no skin or bones) and keep the milk. Soften the leeks in the butter for 8 minutes, stir in the flour, then add the milk to make a thick sauce.
2. Add the cream, mustard and fish, season, and cool completely. Spoon into a 1.2 litre dish.
3. Cover with the pastry, press to a wet rim, trim, cut a vent and brush with egg. Bake at 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6) for **25 to 30 minutes** until golden.

> **HOT MILK, HOT OVEN AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot liquid and steam:** hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.
>
> **Hot oven and hot trays:** ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven

gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Allergens: contains fish, milk, gluten, egg and mustard.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cold or warm potato

Binding.

1. Make two fish cakes, one with cold mash and one with warm, and fry both.

Look for: The cold-mash cake holds its shape; the warm one is soft and breaks up. Cold potato is firmer and holds the fish.

EXPERIMENT

Flour-egg-crumb or flour only

Crunch.

1. Fry one fillet in flour only and one with the full coating.

Look for: The full coating gives a thick, golden crunch; flour alone gives a thin, soft crust.

EXPERIMENT

Pie filling cold or hot

Topping.

1. Top one small pie with warm filling and another with cool filling.

Look for: On the warm filling the mash sinks; on the cool filling it sits on top and browns.

EXPERIMENT

Fresh or dried crumbs

Texture.

1. Coat two fillets, one in fresh crumbs and one in dried or panko.

Look for: Panko and dry crumbs give a lighter, crisper coat; fresh crumbs give a softer, more golden one.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Fish cakes				
Breadcrumbed fillet				
Fish pie				
Haddock and leek pie				
Cold or warm potato				
Flour-egg-crumb or flour only				
Pie filling cold or hot				
Fresh or dried crumbs				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish cakes fall apart	Mash warm or wet, or not chilled	Use cold dry mash; chill for 30 minutes
Coating falls off	Fish wet or not rested	Pat the fish dry; rest after coating
Greasy coating	Oil not hot enough	Check a crumb sizzles; drain on paper
Watery fish pie	Thin sauce or wet fish	Thicken the sauce; pat the fish dry
Mash sinks into filling	Filling too hot or thin	Cool the filling; keep it thick
Dry fish pie	Fish overcooked first	Poach for the minimum and finish in the oven

HOT OIL, HOT OVEN AND LEFTOVERS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Hot oven and hot trays: ovens, trays and tins are hot enough to burn badly. Use dry oven gloves (a damp cloth conducts heat), pull the shelf out a little before lifting a tray, put hot things on a heatproof surface and keep children away from the oven door.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can make fish cakes that hold together.

☐ I can coat fish in flour, egg and crumbs.

☐ I can make a thick sauce for a fish pie.

☐ I can top a pie so it browns and doesn't sink.

☐ I know to cool a filling before topping.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 6 is Prawns and Shellfish: cooking shellfish quickly and safely.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 6 · Prawns and Shellfish

SKILL GOAL

Cook prawns, mussels, scallops and squid quickly so they are tender, and handle them safely.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Shellfish cooks in minutes, and a minute too long turns it from tender to rubbery. The rule is: **hot and fast, then stop.** Prawns turn from grey to pink and curl into a loose C when done (a tight O means overcooked). Mussels open as they steam. Scallops need a hot, dry pan and about 90 seconds per side. Squid is the one exception: cook it for under a minute, or for 30 minutes or more, but nothing in between.

Freshness and safety matter more than with any other food. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep shellfish cold, cook it the day you buy it and never eat shellfish that smells strongly. Raw or lightly cooked shellfish are not taught here. Garlic and lemon go with all of them; for sauces see Cooking Skills: Sauces 1, chapter 6.



Figure 6. Hot and fast: prawns, mussels, scallops and squid each have their own timing.

The method

- **Buy it fresh and cold,** keep it on ice or in the coldest part of the fridge and cook it that day.

- **Prepare with care:** devein prawns, scrub and debeard mussels, remove scallop muscles, and pat everything dry.
- **Cook hot and fast,** watching the colour and shape change rather than the clock.
- **Stop the moment it is done:** prawns pink and curled, mussels open, scallops golden outside and just opaque in the centre.
- **Serve at once;** shellfish toughens as it sits.

SHELLFISH	PREPARE	COOK	DONE WHEN
Prawns	Peel, devein	2 to 3 minutes	Pink and curled into a C
Mussels	Scrub, debeard, discard open ones	4 to 5 minutes, covered	Shells wide open
Scallops	Pat dry, remove side muscle	1 to 2 minutes a side	Golden crust, just opaque
Squid	Clean, slice into rings	1 minute fast	White and just firm

SHELLFISH SAFETY, ALLERGENS AND HOT OIL

Shellfish safety: shellfish must be very fresh and cooked until the shells open and the flesh is firm and opaque. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep it cold (below 5°C), cook it the day you buy it, and never eat shellfish that smells strongly of ammonia. Mussels that stay open when tapped before cooking, or stay shut after cooking, must be thrown away.

Shellfish allergens: crustaceans (prawns) and molluscs (mussels, scallops, squid) are major allergens and can cause severe reactions. Cook them with their own board, pan and tools, tell guests clearly, and don't serve them to anyone who is allergic or unsure.

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Garlic butter prawns

15 minutes | 2 portions | cooking prawns fast

The simplest shellfish dish. Raw king prawns cook in 2 to 3 minutes. Add the garlic late so it doesn't burn and turn bitter. Serve with bread to mop up the butter.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	raw king prawns, peeled and deveined
40 g	butter
3	garlic cloves, finely chopped
½	red chilli, finely chopped (optional)
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, in wedges
1 tbsp	olive oil

1. Pat the prawns dry. Heat the oil in a wide pan over a high heat and cook the prawns for **1 to 2 minutes** a side until pink and curled.
2. Reduce the heat, add the butter, garlic and chilli and cook for 30 seconds.
3. Take off the heat, add the parsley, and serve at once with lemon wedges and bread.

HOT PAN, SHELLFISH AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Shellfish allergens: crustaceans (prawns) and molluscs (mussels, scallops, squid) are major allergens and can cause severe reactions. Cook them with their own board, pan and tools, tell guests clearly, and don't serve them to anyone who is allergic or unsure.

Shellfish safety: shellfish must be very fresh and cooked until the shells open and the flesh is firm and opaque. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep it cold (below 5°C), cook it the day you buy

> it, and never eat shellfish that smells strongly of ammonia. Mussels that stay open when tapped before cooking, or stay shut after cooking, must be thrown away.

LEVEL 2 · STEAMED

Mussels steamed in a tomato broth (no wine)

30 minutes | 2 portions | cleaning mussels and steaming them open

Mussels are cheap, fast and delicious. Scrub them under cold running water, pull off the stringy beard, and throw away any that are cracked or won't close when tapped. Steam in a covered pot, shaking now and then. Stock and tomato replace the usual wine.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1 kg	live mussels
1 tbsp	olive oil
1	small onion, finely chopped
2	garlic cloves, crushed
200 g	tinned chopped tomatoes
150 ml	low-salt fish or vegetable stock
2 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Scrub the mussels, remove the beards, and discard any that are open and don't close when tapped, or have broken shells.
2. Soften the onion in the oil for 5 minutes, add the garlic for 1 minute, then the tomatoes and stock and simmer for 5 minutes.
3. Add the mussels, cover and steam over a high heat for **4 to 5 minutes,** shaking the pan, until they open. Discard any that stay closed. Add the parsley and serve with bread.

SHELLFISH, STEAM AND ALLERGENS

Shellfish safety: shellfish must be very fresh and cooked until the shells open and the flesh is firm and opaque. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep it cold (below 5°C), cook it the day you buy it, and never eat shellfish that smells strongly of ammonia. Mussels that stay open when tapped before cooking, or stay shut after cooking, must be thrown away.

Hot pot and hot steam: a heavy casserole dish or pan of hot liquid is heavy and scalding. Use oven gloves, lift the lid away from your face so the steam doesn't burn you, keep the handles turned in and never carry a full pot across a busy kitchen.

Shellfish allergens: crustaceans (prawns) and molluscs (mussels, scallops, squid) are major allergens and can cause severe reactions. Cook them with their own board, pan and tools, tell guests clearly, and don't serve them to anyone who is allergic or unsure.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

LEVEL 2 · SEARED

Seared scallops with pea purée

25 minutes | 2 portions | searing in a very hot dry pan

Scallops are sweet and tender when seared properly: patted very dry, in a very hot pan, for no longer than 90 seconds a side. Don't crowd the pan or they steam. The pea purée, sweet and green, is quick to make.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

6	large scallops, roe off
200 g	frozen peas
100 ml	hot low-salt vegetable stock
15 g	butter
1 tbsp	chopped fresh mint
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
1 tsp	lemon juice

1. Simmer the peas in the stock for 3 minutes, blend with the butter and mint until smooth, and add the lemon juice. Keep warm.
2. Pat the scallops very dry and season. Heat the oil in a heavy pan until almost smoking.
3. Sear for **1 to 2 minutes** a side until golden brown, with the centre just opaque. Serve on the purée.

VERY HOT PAN, BLENDING AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Blending hot liquids: hot liquid expands in a sealed blender and can blow the lid off and scald you. Let it cool for a few minutes, fill the jug no more than half, hold a folded cloth over the lid, and start on low. A stick blender in a deep pan avoids the problem.

Shellfish allergens: crustaceans (prawns) and molluscs (mussels, scallops, squid) are major allergens and can cause severe reactions. Cook them with their own board, pan and tools, tell

guests clearly, and don't serve them to anyone who is allergic or unsure.

Shellfish safety: shellfish must be very fresh and cooked until the shells open and the flesh is firm and opaque. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep it cold (below 5°C), cook it the day you buy it, and never eat shellfish that smells strongly of ammonia. Mussels that stay open when tapped before cooking, or stay shut after cooking, must be thrown away.

LEVEL 3 · FRIED

Crispy squid

20 minutes | 2 portions | frying quickly in small batches

Squid rings dusted with seasoned flour, shallow-fried in batches for about a minute. They should be golden and tender; over a minute and they turn to rubber. Eat at once with lemon and mayonnaise (see Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 7).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	cleaned squid, in rings
4 tbsp	plain flour
2 tbsp	cornflour
1 tsp	smoked paprika
½ tsp	flaked sea salt
150 ml	rapeseed or sunflower oil, for frying
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Pat the squid very dry. Mix the flour, cornflour, paprika and salt and toss the rings in it, shaking off the extra.
2. Heat the oil in a deep frying pan to about 180°C (a crumb sizzles at once). Fry in 3 batches for **1 minute** each until pale golden.
3. Drain on kitchen paper, season with salt, and serve at once with lemon.

HOT OIL, SPITTING AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Shellfish allergens: crustaceans (prawns) and molluscs (mussels, scallops, squid) are major allergens and can cause severe reactions. Cook them with their own board, pan and tools, tell guests clearly, and don't serve them to anyone who is allergic or unsure.

Shellfish safety: shellfish must be very fresh and cooked until the shells open and the flesh is firm and opaque. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep it cold (below 5°C), cook it the day you buy

it, and never eat shellfish that smells strongly of ammonia. Mussels that stay open when tapped before cooking, or stay shut after cooking, must be thrown away.

Allergens: contains molluscs (squid) and gluten.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Prawns raw or cooked

Texture.

1. Cook raw prawns and add pre-cooked prawns to the pan for 2 minutes.

Look for: Raw prawns cooked fresh are juicy; pre-cooked ones go rubbery if heated for long. Add cooked prawns at the very end.

EXPERIMENT

Overcooking by 2 minutes

Rubber.

1. Cook two prawns for 2 minutes and two for 4.

Look for: At 4 minutes the prawns are tight, dry and rubbery. Shellfish tolerates very little extra time.

EXPERIMENT

Mussels scrubbed or not

Grit.

1. Cook a handful of unscrubbed mussels and a handful of scrubbed ones.

Look for: The unscrubbed ones leave grit in the broth. Always scrub and debeard.

EXPERIMENT

Hot or medium-hot pan for scallops

Sear.

1. Sear one scallop in a very hot pan and another in a medium one.

Look for: The hot pan gives a deep golden crust and a tender centre; the medium one stews and goes pale and tough.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Garlic butter prawns				
Mussels in tomato broth				
Scallops with pea purée				
Crispy squid				
Prawns raw or cooked				
Overcooking by 2 minutes				
Mussels scrubbed or not				
Hot or medium-hot pan for scallops				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Rubbery prawns	Overcooked	Cook for 2 to 3 minutes only and stop
Mussels won't open	Dead or undercooked	Discard any that stay shut after cooking
Gritty broth	Mussels not scrubbed	Scrub and debeard; strain the broth through a fine sieve

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pale scallops	Pan not hot or scallops wet	Dry them well and get the pan very hot
Tough squid	Cooked for 2 to 20 minutes	Cook for 1 minute, or for 30 minutes or more
Bitter garlic	Burned	Add garlic last and cook for 30 seconds

SHELLFISH SAFETY, HOT OIL AND LEFTOVERS

Shellfish safety: shellfish must be very fresh and cooked until the shells open and the flesh is firm and opaque. Buy from a good fishmonger, keep it cold (below 5°C), cook it the day you buy it, and never eat shellfish that smells strongly of ammonia. Mussels that stay open when tapped before cooking, or stay shut after cooking, must be thrown away.

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can prepare prawns, mussels and scallops.

☐ I can tell prawns are done by colour and shape.

☐ I can discard bad mussels.

☐ I can sear a scallop without overcooking it.

☐ I know squid is cooked either fast or slow.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 7 is Grilling, Tacos and Skewers: high heat, marinades and quick service.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 7 · Grilling, Tacos and Skewers

SKILL GOAL

Grill fish over high heat without sticking, and turn it into tacos and skewers.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Grilling is the quickest, most flavourful way to cook oily fish, because the fat bastes the fish as it cooks and the heat blisters the skin. It also demands attention: a minute or two too long and thin fillets dry out. Three rules help. Start with a **very hot, clean, lightly oiled grill** (or a ridged grill pan). **Oil the fish, not the grate.** And **do not turn it too soon**: wait until it releases naturally.

Firm fish, such as salmon, mackerel and cod, grills well; thin, delicate fish like plaice break up. Wooden skewers must be soaked in water for 30 minutes first so they do not burn. For marinades see Cooking Skills: Sauces 2, chapter 7, for a fresh salsa to go in tacos Cooking Skills: Sauces 2, chapter 5, and for barbecue and grilling more generally Cooking Skills: Beef and Steak 2, chapter 6.

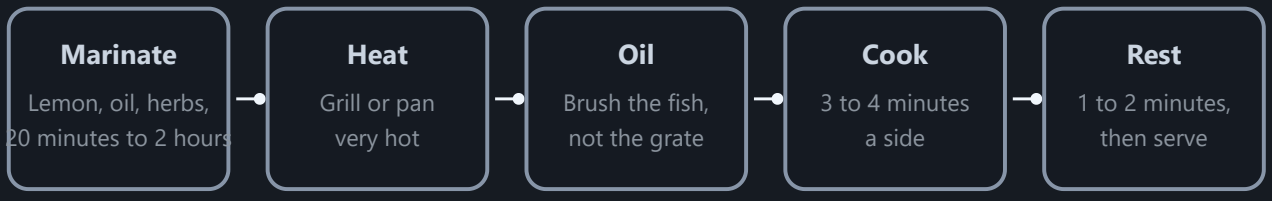


Figure 7. Grilling in five steps: marinate, heat, oil the fish, cook, rest.

The method

- **Marinate briefly:** 20 minutes to 2 hours in oil, lemon and herbs; longer and the acid makes the fish mushy.
- **Heat the grill fully** and clean it, then oil the fish lightly rather than the grate.
- **Lay the fish away from you,** skin side down for oily fish, and leave it until it releases.
- **Turn once,** using a wide fish slice, and cook until opaque with blistered skin.
- **Rest for 1 to 2 minutes** and serve straight away with lemon or lime.

DISH	FISH	HEAT (APPROXIMATE)	TIME
Grilled mackerel	Whole fillets, skin on	Hot grill	4 to 5 minutes, skin side up
Salmon skewers	3 cm cubes	Hot grill or barbecue	8 to 10 minutes, turning
Fish tacos	Strips of firm white fish	Hot pan or grill	2 to 3 minutes a side
Grilled sardines	Whole, gutted	Very hot grill	3 to 4 minutes a side

HOT GRILL, FLARE-UPS AND BONES

Hot grill and hot barbecue: a grill, grill pan or barbecue is extremely hot, and oily fish drips fat that flares. Stand back, use long tongs and oven gloves, keep the grill pan clear of loose items, and never leave it unattended. Use a barbecue outdoors only; it gives off carbon monoxide.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Shellfish allergens: crustaceans (prawns) and molluscs (mussels, scallops, squid) are major allergens and can cause severe reactions. Cook them with their own board, pan and tools, tell guests clearly, and don't serve them to anyone who is allergic or unsure.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Grilled mackerel

15 minutes | 2 portions | grilling skin side up

Oily mackerel is made for the grill. Score the skin so it does not curl and the heat penetrates. The skin blisters and the flesh stays moist. Serve with lemon and a spoonful of horseradish or mustard.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

4	mackerel fillets, skin on
1 tbsp	olive oil
½ tsp	flaked sea salt
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Heat the grill to its highest setting. Pat the mackerel dry, score the skin 3 times, brush with oil and season with salt.
2. Lay the fillets skin side up on a foil-lined grill tray, about 8 cm below the heat.
3. Grill for **4 to 5 minutes** until the skin is blistered and the flesh flakes; no need to turn. Serve with lemon.

HOT GRILL, BONES AND ALLERGENS

Hot grill and hot barbecue: a grill, grill pan or barbecue is extremely hot, and oily fish drips fat that flares. Stand back, use long tongs and oven gloves, keep the grill pan clear of loose items, and never leave it unattended. Use a barbecue outdoors only; it gives off carbon monoxide.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards,

> oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 2 · SKEWERS

Salmon skewers

40 minutes | 4 skewers | threading and turning

Cubes of salmon on a skewer, alternating with peppers and onion, marinated briefly in lemon and herbs. Cut the cubes the same size so they cook together, and turn the skewers a quarter turn every 2 minutes.

INGREDIENTS (4 SKEWERS)

400 g	skinless salmon, in 3 cm cubes
2 tbsp	olive oil
1	lemon, zest and juice
1 tsp	chopped fresh thyme
1	red pepper, in 3 cm pieces
1	red onion, in wedges
4	wooden skewers, soaked in water for 30 minutes

1. Mix the oil, lemon zest and juice, thyme and a pinch of salt. Coat the salmon and leave for **20 minutes** (no more than 2 hours).
2. Thread the salmon, pepper and onion onto the skewers. Heat the grill or barbecue until very hot.
3. Grill for **8 to 10 minutes,** turning every 2 minutes, until the salmon is opaque and charred in places.

> **HOT GRILL, WOODEN SKEWERS AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot grill and hot barbecue:** a grill, grill pan or barbecue is extremely hot, and oily fish drips fat that flares. Stand back, use long tongs and oven gloves, keep the grill pan clear of loose items, and never leave it unattended. Use a barbecue outdoors only; it gives off carbon monoxide.
>
> **Raw fish:** keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.
>
> **Is it cooked?:** fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with

a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 2 · TACOS

Fish tacos with salsa

30 minutes | 4 portions (8 tacos) | seasoning, searing and assembling

Strips of firm white fish rubbed with cumin and paprika, seared quickly, and piled into warm tortillas with crunchy cabbage, salsa and yogurt. Keep the fish chunky so it doesn't fall apart. A fresh tomato salsa recipe is in Cooking Skills: Sauces 2, chapter 5.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

400 g	skinless firm white fish (cod or hake), in strips
1 tsp	smoked paprika
1 tsp	ground cumin
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil
8	small flour tortillas, warmed
150 g	white cabbage, finely shredded
150 g	tomato salsa
100 g	natural yogurt
1	lime, juiced

1. Toss the fish with the paprika, cumin and a pinch of salt. Mix the cabbage with the lime juice and a pinch of salt.
2. Heat the oil in a pan over a high heat and sear the fish for **2 to 3 minutes** a side until golden and just cooked through.
3. Fill the warm tortillas with cabbage, fish, salsa and a spoonful of yogurt, and serve at once.

> **HOT PAN AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot pan and hot oil:** frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.
>
> **Is it cooked?:** fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off

the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: contains fish, gluten and milk.

LEVEL 3 · WHOLE

Grilled sardines

20 minutes | 2 portions | grilling whole small fish

Fresh sardines are cheap and delicious grilled whole. Ask your fishmonger to gut them. Oil them and season with salt, grill on a hot grill or barbecue, and eat with lemon and bread, picking out the bones. Sardines can fall apart, so turn them once with a wide slice.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

8	fresh sardines, gutted and scaled
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	flaked sea salt
1	lemon, in wedges
1 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Heat the grill or barbecue until very hot. Pat the sardines dry, brush with oil and sprinkle with salt.
2. Grill for **3 to 4 minutes** on one side without moving, until the skin blisters and releases. Turn once and cook for 3 minutes.
3. Serve with lemon wedges and parsley. Warn eaters about the small bones.

HOT GRILL, BONES AND ALLERGENS

Hot grill and hot barbecue: a grill, grill pan or barbecue is extremely hot, and oily fish drips fat that flares. Stand back, use long tongs and oven gloves, keep the grill pan clear of loose items, and never leave it unattended. Use a barbecue outdoors only; it gives off carbon monoxide.

Bones: even fillets can hide thin pin bones. Run a clean finger along the fillet and pull any bones out with tweezers, and warn children and anyone you serve. Whole sardines and mackerel have fine bones that are best taken out.

Smoked and oily fish for some people: pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weak immune systems are advised to limit oily fish and shark, swordfish and marlin, and to avoid raw or lightly cooked shellfish and, for some, cold-smoked fish. This is general guidance, not medical advice: check current health guidance if it applies to you.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards,

> oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Marinade for 20 minutes or 2 hours

Mushiness.

1. Marinate two pieces of salmon, one for 20 minutes and one for 2 hours, in lemon and oil.

Look for: The 2-hour piece is paler on the outside, firmer and a little mushy; the short marinade keeps the texture.

EXPERIMENT

Oiled or dry grate

Sticking.

1. Grill one fillet on a cleaned, oiled grate and one on a dry grate.

Look for: The dry grate sticks and tears the skin. Brushing oil on the fish and cleaning the grate fixes it.

EXPERIMENT

Skewers soaked or not

Burning.

1. Grill two skewers, one soaked in water for 30 minutes and one dry.

Look for: The dry skewer burns and chars; the soaked one survives. Metal skewers need no soaking.

EXPERIMENT

Thin or thick pieces

Doneness.

1. Grill 1 cm and 3 cm pieces of the same fish together.

Look for: The thin piece overcooks while the thick one is just done. Keep pieces the same size.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Grilled mackerel				
Salmon skewers				
Fish tacos				
Grilled sardines				
Marinade for 20 minutes or 2 hours				
Oiled or dry grate				
Skewers soaked or not				
Thin or thick pieces				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish sticks to the grill	Dirty or dry grate; turned too soon	Clean and oil lightly, oil the fish, and wait for it to release
Fish falls through the grate	Fish too delicate or pieces too small	Use skewers, a fish basket or foil

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Burnt outside, raw inside	Heat too high or fish too thick	Lower the heat, or finish in the oven
Dry fish	Overcooked	Remove a minute early
Flare-ups	Dripping fat	Move the fish; keep a spray bottle of water ready
Tacos fall apart	Fish overcooked and flaking	Cook for the minimum and keep the pieces chunky

HOT GRILL, BARBECUE SAFETY AND LEFTOVERS

Hot grill and hot barbecue: a grill, grill pan or barbecue is extremely hot, and oily fish drips fat that flares. Stand back, use long tongs and oven gloves, keep the grill pan clear of loose items, and never leave it unattended. Use a barbecue outdoors only; it gives off carbon monoxide.

Barbecue safety: use a barbecue outdoors only, never in a tent, garage or indoors, because it gives off carbon monoxide, which you cannot see or smell. Never use petrol or extra lighter fluid on lit coals, keep children and pets away, and let the ash cool fully (often a full day) before putting it in a metal container. Charred, burnt meat is best kept to a minimum (general guidance).

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can heat and clean a grill and oil the fish.
- ☐ I can wait for fish to release before turning.
- ☐ I can thread and turn skewers.
- ☐ I can build a fish taco.
- ☐ I can grill whole small fish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 8 is A Fish Supper: planning, buying and freezing.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1

Chapter 8 · A Fish Supper

SKILL GOAL

Plan, shop for, cook and store fish meals with confidence.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Fish is the most perishable thing in the kitchen, so the skill of using it well is partly cooking and partly **planning.** Buy fresh fish for the first meals in the week, and keep frozen fish and tinned fish for the days after. Cook the fresh fish on the day you buy it or the next. Frozen fish is excellent if it is frozen well and thawed slowly in the fridge.

A fish supper needs timing, because fish cooks in minutes and goes cold quickly. Everything else should be ready before the fish goes on: potatoes boiling, vegetables prepped, plates warming. This chapter brings together the whole course: Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapters 1 to 7. For wider meal planning see Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 9, and for a sauce to go with fish Cooking Skills: Sauces 1, chapter 6.



Figure 8. A supper is planned backwards from the moment you eat.

The method

- **Plan the week:** fresh fish for the first two days, then frozen, tinned and smoked fish.
- **Write the timeline backwards** from serving time, with the fish going on last.

- **Prepare sauces and sides first;** fish is the last thing to cook and the first to be spoilt by waiting.
- **Freeze extra fillets** on the day you buy them, wrapped well and labelled.
- **Defrost in the fridge overnight,** and cook within a day.

DAY	FISH	STYLE	FROM
Monday	Fresh sea bass or salmon	Pan-fried or baked	Chapters 2 and 3
Tuesday	Prawns or mussels	Quick shellfish dish	Chapter 6
Wednesday	Frozen white fish	Fish fingers or tacos	Chapters 1 and 7
Thursday	Smoked haddock	Kedgeree or pie	Chapters 4 and 5
Friday	Tinned sardines or mackerel	Toast or pâté	Chapter 1

FREEZING, DEFROSTING AND KEEPING FISH SAFE

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

Freezing and defrosting: freeze fish flat in labelled bags for up to about 3 months (general guidance). Defrost on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge, never on the worktop, and cook it within a day. Do not refreeze raw fish that has thawed.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

A fish supper for four

1 hour | 4 portions | timing a whole meal around the fish

Pan-fried sea bass with lemon butter, buttered new potatoes and green beans. The fish takes 6 minutes, so everything else is ready first. Follow the timeline and keep plates warm. Pan-frying is covered in Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 2.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4	sea bass fillets, skin on
600 g	baby new potatoes
200 g	green beans, trimmed
50 g	butter
1	lemon, juiced
2 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 tbsp	rapeseed or sunflower oil

1. 45 minutes before: boil the potatoes for 15 to 20 minutes. Warm the plates in a low oven. Dry the fish well on kitchen paper.
2. 10 minutes before: boil the beans for 4 minutes and drain. Heat the oil, lay the fish skin side down and cook **3 to 4 minutes** without moving it.
3. Turn the fish for 1 minute, add half the butter and the lemon juice to the pan, and toss the potatoes with the rest of the butter and parsley. Serve at once.

HOT PAN, BOILING WATER AND ALLERGENS

Hot pan and hot oil: frying fish uses a hot pan and spitting oil. Dry the fish well, lay it down away from you, use a splash guard if you have one, keep the handle turned in and keep children well back.

Hot liquid and steam: hot milk, stock and poaching liquid scald badly and steam burns faster than boiling water. Keep the handle turned in, lift lids away from your face, use a slotted spoon or fish slice over the pan, and never carry a full pan across a busy kitchen.

Is it cooked?: fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with

a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 2 · PLAN

A week of fish meals

Planning: 20 minutes | 5 meals for 2 | planning a week around fish's shelf life

Plan five fish meals for two, using fresh, frozen, smoked and tinned fish across the week. Buy on Sunday or Monday and freeze whatever is not for the first two days. The shopping list shows the fish, with the vegetables left to you.

INGREDIENTS (5 MEALS FOR 2)

300 g	fresh sea bass or salmon (Monday)
300 g	raw prawns or mussels (Tuesday, buy that day)
300 g	frozen white fish (Wednesday)
300 g	undyed smoked haddock (Thursday)
2	tins of sardines or mackerel (Friday)
1	freezer bags and a marker

1. On Sunday write the plan: day, fish, method, and the chapter in this course. Check what is in the freezer.
2. Buy the Monday fish fresh; put the Wednesday fish in the freezer if it is fresh, or take it out on Tuesday night to defrost in the fridge.
3. Each evening cook the planned dish, and tick it off. At the end of the week note what you would change.

RAW FISH, FREEZING AND ALLERGENS

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards,

> oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

LEVEL 2 · FREEZER

Freezing a batch of fish

20 minutes | 4 fillets | portioning, wrapping and defrosting

Buy a larger pack when fish is on offer and freeze it in portions. Freeze it the day you buy it. Good wrapping stops freezer burn. Label each bag with the fish, the date and the number of portions.

INGREDIENTS (4 FILLETS)

4	fresh fish fillets
4	freezer bags
1	roll of cling film
1	permanent marker
1	plate for defrosting

1. Pat the fillets dry, wrap each tightly in cling film and put each in a freezer bag, pressing out the air. Label with the fish, date and portions.
2. Freeze flat on a tray for **2 hours,** then stack. Use within about 3 months.
3. To defrost, put a fillet on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge overnight. Pat dry before cooking and cook within a day.

> **FREEZING, RAW FISH AND DEFROSTING**
>
> **Raw fish:** keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.
>
> **Leftover fish:** cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.
>
> **Is it cooked?:** fish is done when the flesh turns opaque (no longer glassy) and flakes easily with a fork. A probe thermometer reads about 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Take it off the heat a minute early, because it keeps cooking as it rests.

LEVEL 3 · SIGNATURE

Your signature fish dish

Your choice | your choice | designing a fish dish from your favourite methods

Choose a fish, a method (pan-fry, bake, poach, grill or coat) and a sauce (lemon butter, dill yogurt, salsa or parsley sauce), and write the recipe as you cook it. Make it twice, changing one thing. A signature dish is one you can cook without a recipe.

INGREDIENTS (YOUR CHOICE)

1	fish of your choice (about 150 g a person)
1	method from chapters 2 to 7
1	sauce or topping of your choice
1	notebook and pen

1. Choose your fish, method and sauce, and write them down before you start.
2. Cook it, noting the times, the temperatures and what you would change.
3. Cook it again with your change, then write the final recipe on a card.

RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS

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Experiments

EXPERIMENT

A timed fish session

Planning.

1. Cook a full fish supper for two with a timer and write down when each task started and finished.

Look for: You will see that fish is the quickest part and the vegetables set the pace. Start the slow things first.

EXPERIMENT

Swap one fish

Flexibility.

1. Cook the same recipe with a different fish, for example salmon instead of sea bass.

Look for: Oily and white fish cook differently; note how much the timing and the flavour change.

EXPERIMENT

Freezing against fresh

Quality.

1. Cook a fresh fillet and one frozen for a month, the same way, and compare.

Look for: Properly wrapped fish loses very little; badly wrapped fish is dry at the edges. Wrapping matters.

EXPERIMENT

Your own signature dish

Making it yours.

1. Cook your signature dish for a friend and ask for one comment.

Look for: A repeated dish improves every time. Write it down.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Fish supper for four				
Week of fish meals				
Freezing a batch of fish				
Signature fish dish				
A timed fish session				
Swap one fish				
Freezing against fresh				
Your own signature dish				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish ready but sides not	Poor timing	Write the timeline backwards and start the slow items first
Fish cold at the table	Plates cold or waited too long	Warm the plates and serve at once
Frozen fish watery	Thawed too fast or wrapped badly	Defrost in the fridge, pat dry, and wrap tightly
Fish smells before cooking	Old fish	Don't eat it; buy fresh next time
Week plan falls apart	Too ambitious	Plan fewer fresh-fish days and rely on frozen and tinned
Freezer burn	Air in the bag	Press out the air and double-wrap

FREEZING, LEFTOVERS AND ALLERGENS

Leftover fish: cool cooked fish quickly, refrigerate it within 1 to 2 hours, and eat it within about 1 day (2 at most). Reheat only once, until steaming hot all the way through. Do not refreeze fish that was frozen and thawed unless you cook it first.

Raw fish: keep raw fish on its own board and plate, away from food that won't be cooked. Wash your hands, boards and knives in hot soapy water afterwards, and store raw fish on a plate on the bottom shelf of the fridge so it can't drip onto other food.

Allergens: fish is one of the 14 major allergens, and cross-contact is easy: it can pass on boards, oil, tongs and pans. Crustaceans (prawns), molluscs (mussels, scallops), gluten, milk and egg also appear in fish recipes. Always tell guests what is in a dish.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can plan a week of fish meals.

☐ I can time a supper backwards from serving.

☐ I can freeze and defrost fish safely.

☐ I can cook fish by five methods.

☐ I have a signature fish dish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Congratulations: you have finished Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1. Fish and Shellfish 2 is planned for whole fish and filleting, fish stews and curries, shellfish in depth, and curing and smoking.