

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

8 Chapters

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COOKING SKILLS: FISH AND SHELLFISH 2

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Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 1 · Whole Fish

SKILL GOAL

Buy, prepare and cook a fish on the bone so it is moist, well seasoned and easy to serve.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A whole fish cooks **on the bone,** and the bones, skin and head hold in moisture and flavour, so it is harder to dry out than a fillet and looks wonderful on the table. The price is a little more work: ask the fishmonger to **gut and scale** it, check the eyes are clear and bulging, the gills bright red and the smell fresh and sea-like. Count on one fish of about 400 to 500 g per person, or a larger one of 1.5 kg for four.

Thickness is what matters, not weight. **Slashing** the skin two or three times each side lets heat reach the middle and stops the skin splitting. A fish is done when the flesh lifts easily from the bone at the thickest part of the back, or reads about 63°C (general guidance). Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 1 covers buying and doneness for fillets, and chapter 3 covers parcels and open trays.



Figure 1. Prepare, slash, cook, test: the four steps for any whole fish.

The method

- **Buy it gutted and scaled,** then rinse inside and out and pat very dry.

- **Season inside and out,** and fill the cavity with lemon slices and herbs (they scent the flesh).
- **Slash the skin** two or three times each side, just through the skin, for even cooking.
- **Cook hot,** about 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6), on a tray lined with baking paper, and don't turn it more than once.
- **Test at the back:** the flesh should lift from the bone; rest for 5 minutes, then serve by lifting the top fillet off in one piece.

METHOD	BEST FOR	TIME (APPROXIMATE)	RESULT
Open roast	Sea bream, bass, trout	20 to 25 minutes at 200°C	Crisp skin, moist flesh
Pan then oven	Small trout, mackerel	3 minutes + 10 minutes	Golden skin, quick
Salt crust	Bream, bass (1 kg)	30 to 35 minutes at 200°C	Very moist, gently seasoned
Foil on the barbecue	Trout, mackerel	15 to 20 minutes	Steamed, smoky, no sticking

RAW FISH, BONES, 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.

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.

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.

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

Whole roast sea bream with lemon and herbs

40 minutes | 2 portions | slashing, stuffing and roasting a whole fish

A classic. A bream of about 450 g per person, stuffed with lemon and herbs, roasted hot on a tray. The aim is crisp skin and flesh that lifts from the bone. Pat the skin dry and rub it with a little oil and salt so it crisps.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	whole sea bream (about 450 g each), gutted and scaled
1	lemon, half sliced and half in wedges
4	sprigs thyme
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1 tsp	flaked sea salt
1	garlic clove, sliced

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Rinse and pat the fish dry. Slash each side twice, rub with oil and salt, and fill the cavity with lemon slices, thyme, garlic and parsley.
2. Lay on a lined tray and roast for **20 to 25 minutes** until the flesh lifts from the bone at the thickest part of the back.
3. Rest for 5 minutes and serve with lemon wedges, warning that bones remain.

RAW FISH, BONES AND HOT OVEN

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.

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.

LEVEL 2 · PAN AND OVEN

Trout with almonds

30 minutes | 2 portions | a quick pan sear and a short oven finish

Trout is small, cheap and quick, and almonds add crunch. Brown the fish in a pan first, then finish in the oven so the skin stays crisp. Brown the butter and almonds in a separate pan and spoon them over at the end.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	whole trout (about 350 g each), gutted
2 tbsp	plain flour, seasoned
2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
40 g	butter
40 g	flaked almonds
1	lemon, juice and wedges
1 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Pat the trout dry and dust lightly with flour.
2. Sear in a hot ovenproof pan with the oil for **2 to 3 minutes** a side until golden, then move to the oven for **8 to 10 minutes.**
3. Melt the butter in a small pan, add the almonds and cook until nut-brown. Add the lemon juice and parsley, spoon over the fish and serve.

HOT PAN, BONES, 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.

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, nuts (almonds), milk and gluten.

LEVEL 3 · SALT CRUST

A whole fish baked in a salt crust

1 hour | 3 to 4 portions | sealing a fish in a salt shell

The salt crust makes a sealed oven that steams the fish in its own juices. The fish does not become salty: the skin protects it. Crack the crust at the table, lift away the top, peel off the skin and serve the flesh. Use coarse salt and egg white to bind.

INGREDIENTS (3 TO 4 PORTIONS)

1	whole sea bass or bream (about 1 kg), gutted but not scaled
1 kg	coarse sea salt
3	egg whites
3 tbsp	water
1	lemon, sliced
4	sprigs thyme
1	fennel bulb, sliced (optional)

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Stuff the fish with lemon, thyme and fennel. Mix the salt, egg whites and water to a damp, sand-like paste.
2. Spread a layer of salt on a lined tray, lay the fish on it and cover completely with the rest, patting it firm.
3. Bake for **30 to 35 minutes.** Rest for 10 minutes, crack the crust with a spoon, lift off the pieces, peel the skin and serve.

SALT CRUST, HOT OVEN, ALLERGENS

Salt crust and hot trays: a salt crust is heavy and holds heat for a long time. Lift the tray with both hands and dry oven gloves, rest it on a heatproof surface, and take care cracking the crust, because steam and hot salt escape. Keep children away.

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

LEVEL 3 · OUTDOOR

A whole fish in foil on the barbecue

35 minutes | 2 portions | cooking a whole fish in a sealed parcel over coals

Foil stops a delicate fish sticking to the grate or breaking. Make the parcel generous, with a shaped dome for steam. It also works under a hot grill or in the oven if the weather is poor.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	whole trout or mackerel (about 350 g each), gutted
1	lemon, sliced
4	sprigs dill or parsley
1	garlic clove, sliced
2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1 tsp	flaked sea salt

1. Heat a barbecue to a medium heat with ash-covered coals. Lay each fish on a double sheet of oiled foil. Season it and fill with lemon, herbs and garlic.
2. Fold the foil over and crimp the edges to seal with room above the fish for steam.
3. Cook for **15 to 20 minutes,** turning once. Open away from your face, check the flesh lifts, and serve in the foil.

HOT FOIL, BARBECUE AND BONES

Hot foil parcels and barbecue: foil parcels hold boiling steam that scalds when opened. Open them away from your face with tongs and gloves. Use a barbecue outdoors only, never in a tent or garage, because it gives off carbon monoxide, and never leave it unattended.

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).

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.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Slashed or not

Even cooking.

1. Roast two small trout, one slashed and one not.

Look for: The slashed fish cooks evenly and the skin stays whole; the unslashed one has a raw patch near the bone or a split skin.

EXPERIMENT

Stuffed or empty

Flavour.

1. Roast two bream, one with lemon and herbs inside and one empty.

Look for: The stuffed fish smells and tastes of lemon and thyme; the empty one is plainer.

EXPERIMENT

Testing at the bone

Doneness.

1. Test a bream at 15, 20 and 25 minutes by lifting the flesh near the backbone.

Look for: At 15 the flesh clings and is glassy; at 20 to 25 it lifts easily and is opaque.

EXPERIMENT

Whole against fillet

Moisture.

1. Cook a whole trout and a trout fillet in the same oven for the same time.

Look for: The whole fish stays moister; the fillet dries out sooner because there are no bones or skin to protect it.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Roast sea bream				
Trout with almonds				
Salt-crust fish				
Foil fish on the barbecue				
Slashed or not				
Stuffed or empty				
Testing at the bone				
Whole against fillet				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Skin sticks to the tray	Tray unlined or fish wet	Line with baking paper; pat the fish dry
Skin splits	Not slashed	Slash two or three times each side
Raw near the bone	Fish too thick or oven too low	Slash deeper; test at the back

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Dry flesh	Overcooked	Take out a minute early and rest
Salt crust won't crack	Crust too thick	Use a spoon handle; keep it about 1 cm
Foil parcel leaks	Poorly sealed	Use double foil and crimp the edges

RAW FISH, BONES AND LEFTOVERS

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.

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 choose a fresh whole fish.
- ☐ I can slash and season a whole fish.
- ☐ I can tell when a whole fish is done.
- ☐ I can lift the fillets from a cooked fish.
- ☐ I can cook a fish in a salt crust or foil.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 2 is Filleting and Stock: taking a fish apart and using the bones.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 2 · Filleting and Stock

SKILL GOAL

Fillet a round and a flat fish, skin a fillet, and turn the bones into a quick, clear stock.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Filleting is a skill of **feel,** not force. A thin, flexible, very sharp knife follows the backbone and rib bones, and the less you saw, the cleaner the fillet. A **round fish** (mackerel, trout, bass) has two fillets, one from each side. A **flat fish** (plaice, sole) has four, two on each side of a central bone. Cooking Skills: Knife Skills 1, chapter 8 introduces the basic cuts; this chapter goes much further.

Don't throw away the frame. Bones and heads from **white fish** make a light, clear stock in 20 to 25 minutes (longer makes it bitter, and oily fish makes it too strong). Use it for the chowders and stews in Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 3, and for the soups in Cooking Skills: Soups and Stocks 1, chapter 2.

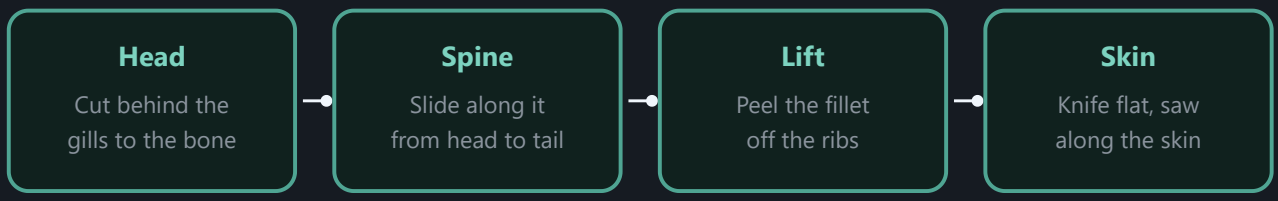


Figure 2. Four steps for a round fish: head, spine, lift and skin.

The method

- **Sharpen the knife and steady the board** with a damp cloth under it.
- **Cut behind the gills** and the head down to the backbone, then turn the knife flat towards the tail.

- **Slide along the backbone** in long, light strokes, letting the knife ride on the bones.
- **Lift the fillet off the ribs,** trimming the belly bones and pulling out pin bones with tweezers.
- **Skin with the knife flat,** holding the tail end with salt on your fingers and sawing gently.

FISH	FILLETS	KNIFE	TIP
Mackerel (round)	2	Flexible filleting knife	Slide along the spine; trim the belly
Plaice (flat)	4	Flexible filleting knife	Cut down the centre line first
Salmon fillet	Skin off	Long flat knife	Hold the tail end with salt
Frame for stock	-	Cleaver or large knife	Chop and rinse out the blood

SHARP KNIVES, RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS

Filleting knife and slippery fish: a filleting knife is thin and very sharp, and fish skin and slime are slippery. Work on a damp cloth or non-slip mat, cut away from your hand, keep your free hand flat and clear of the blade, and never try to catch a falling knife. Wash the board and knife in hot soapy water straight after.

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.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Filleting a mackerel

20 minutes | 2 portions (4 fillets) | a first round-fish fillet

Mackerel is the best fish to learn on: it is cheap, fresh mackerel has a firm body, and the bones are easy to follow. Practise on two, and cook the fillets by grilling or pan-frying (see Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 2).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	whole mackerel (about 300 g each), gutted
1 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1	lemon, in wedges
1 pinch	flaked sea salt

1. Lay a fish on a board steadied with a damp cloth. Cut down behind the gills to the backbone, then turn the knife flat and slide it along the spine to the tail, making one long cut. Repeat on the other side.
2. Trim the belly bones in a thin strip, and pull any pin bones with tweezers. Rinse and pat dry.
3. Fry skin-side down in the hot oil for **3 minutes**, turn for 1 minute, season and serve with lemon.

> **SHARP KNIFE, RAW FISH AND BONES**
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> **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.

> **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.

LEVEL 2 · FLAT FISH

Filleting a plaice

25 minutes | 2 portions (4 fillets) | four fillets from a flat fish

A flat fish has a central bone line down the middle. Cut along it, then use short strokes to ease each fillet away over the outer fin bones. It is neater than it sounds. Dust the fillets in flour and pan-fry in butter.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	whole plaice (about 600 g), gutted, head on
3 tbsp	plain flour, seasoned
30 g	butter
1 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Lay the plaice dark side up. Cut down the central line from head to tail to the bone, then work the knife flat under the flesh, sliding outwards with short strokes to lift each fillet. Do both halves, then turn it over and repeat.
2. Keep the frame for stock (recipe 4). Pat the fillets dry and dust with flour.
3. Fry in the hot butter and oil for **2 minutes a side**. Serve with lemon.

SHARP KNIFE, RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS

Filleting knife and slippery fish: a filleting knife is thin and very sharp, and fish skin and slime are slippery. Work on a damp cloth or non-slip mat, cut away from your hand, keep your free hand flat and clear of the blade, and never try to catch a falling knife. Wash the board and knife in hot soapy water straight after.

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: contains fish, milk and gluten.

LEVEL 2 · SKINNING

Skinning a fillet

15 minutes | 2 portions | removing skin cleanly

Skin a salmon or cod fillet so it can be poached, cured or cut into even pieces. Hold the tail end with a pinch of salt, lay the knife nearly flat against the skin and push away from you with a gentle sawing motion, keeping the blade angled slightly down.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

1	skin-on salmon or cod fillet (about 400 g)
1 pinch	coarse sea salt
1 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Lay the fillet skin-side down with the tail towards you. Salt your fingers and hold the tail end firmly.
2. Slide the knife between flesh and skin, blade almost flat, and saw gently away, pulling the skin as you go.
3. Feel for pin bones and pull them with tweezers. Cut into two portions and pan-fry for **3 minutes a side**, or poach.

> **SHARP KNIFE AND RAW FISH**
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> **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 · STOCK

A 25-minute fish stock

35 minutes | about 1 litre | making a clear, light stock

Fish stock is the fastest stock there is, and it must not cook long, or it turns bitter and cloudy. Use white fish bones and heads (never oily fish, and no gills), rinse out any blood, and simmer gently. No alcohol is used.

INGREDIENTS (ABOUT 1 LITRE)

1 kg	white fish bones and heads (gills removed), chopped and rinsed
1	onion, sliced
1	celery stick, sliced
1	leek, sliced
1	bay leaf
6	parsley stalks
6	white peppercorns
1.5 litres	cold water
2	lemon slices

1. Put everything in a large pan and bring slowly to a simmer. Skim off any scum.
2. Simmer gently for **20 to 25 minutes** without boiling hard.
3. Strain through a fine sieve into a heatproof bowl, cool quickly and chill. Use within about 1 day or freeze.

HOT STOCK AND STORAGE

Hot stock: a pan of simmering stock is heavy and scalding. Keep the handle turned in, strain it carefully into a heatproof bowl, and cool it quickly, because fish stock spoils fast: chill within about 1 hour and use within about 1 day, or freeze.

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.

> **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

Sharp or blunt knife

Clean cutting.

1. Fillet two mackerel, one with a sharpened knife and one with a blunt one.

Look for: The sharp knife gives smooth fillets and little waste; the blunt one tears the flesh and needs more force.

EXPERIMENT

Along or against the bones

Technique.

1. Cut one fillet with long strokes along the bones and another with short, hacking cuts.

Look for: Long strokes leave a clean fillet with meat on the frame; hacking leaves jagged edges and flesh on the bones.

EXPERIMENT

Stock simmered 20 or 60 minutes

Flavour.

1. Taste two stocks made from the same bones, one stopped at 20 minutes and one at 60.

Look for: The 20-minute stock is light and sweet; the 60-minute stock is cloudy and slightly bitter.

EXPERIMENT

Scales on or off

Texture.

1. Pan-fry one scaled and one unscaled small fish skin-side down.

Look for: The unscaled skin is tough and gritty; the scaled skin crisps. Scaling matters.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Filleting a mackerel				
Filleting a plaice				
Skinning a fillet				
Fish stock				
Sharp or blunt knife				
Along or against the bones				
Stock simmered 20 or 60 minutes				
Scales on or off				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fillet is ragged	Knife blunt or sawing	Sharpen the knife; use long, light strokes
Lots of flesh left on the frame	Knife not riding the bone	Keep the blade flat on the bones
Skin tears off in pieces	Knife angle too steep	Keep the blade almost flat
Pin bones remain	Missed by touch	Run a finger along and use tweezers

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Cloudy stock	Boiled hard	Simmer gently; skim scum
Bitter stock	Simmered too long or gills left in	Stop at 25 minutes; remove the gills

SHARP KNIVES, STOCK AND LEFTOVERS

Filleting knife and slippery fish: a filleting knife is thin and very sharp, and fish skin and slime are slippery. Work on a damp cloth or non-slip mat, cut away from your hand, keep your free hand flat and clear of the blade, and never try to catch a falling knife. Wash the board and knife in hot soapy water straight after.

Hot stock: a pan of simmering stock is heavy and scalding. Keep the handle turned in, strain it carefully into a heatproof bowl, and cool it quickly, because fish stock spoils fast: chill within about 1 hour and use within about 1 day, or freeze.

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 fillet a round fish.
- ☐ I can fillet a flat fish.
- ☐ I can skin a fillet cleanly.
- ☐ I can remove pin bones.
- ☐ I can make a clear fish stock.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 3 is Fish Stews and Chowders: layering fish in a pot so each cooks right.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 3 · Fish Stews and Chowders

SKILL GOAL

Layer fish, potato and shellfish in a pot so every piece cooks just right.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A fish stew is a pot built in **layers,** because different fish cook at different speeds. Start with a soft **base** of onion, celery and garlic, add the **liquid** (stock, milk or tomatoes), then the **potatoes** and **firm fish**, and last the **delicate fish and shellfish**, which need only a few minutes. A **chowder** is a creamy, thick version with potato; **cullen skink** is the Scottish smoked haddock soup; a **bouillabaisse-style** stew is the Mediterranean tomato and saffron version.

Everything depends on timing and a gentle simmer, because a fast boil breaks up the fish. Use the stock from Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 2, or a carton of low-salt stock. For a thick white base see Cooking Skills: Sauces 1, chapter 2, and for the fish-cooking judgement see Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 4. No wine is used here; stock, lemon and tomato replace it.

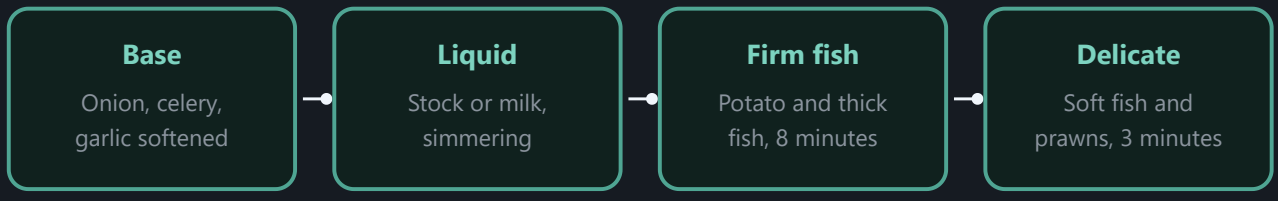


Figure 3. Base, liquid, firm fish, then delicate fish: the order of a good stew.

The method

- **Soften the base slowly** in butter or oil; it builds the flavour.

- **Add the liquid and potatoes,** and simmer until the potato is nearly tender.
- **Add firm fish** (haddock, cod, hake) cut into big chunks, which hold together better.
- **Add delicate fish and shellfish last,** turn off the heat and let them finish gently.
- **Taste at the end,** adding lemon or parsley for freshness, and serve straight away.

STEW	BASE LIQUID	FISH	TIME (APPROXIMATE)
Smoked haddock chowder	Milk and stock	Smoked haddock, white fish	30 minutes
Tomato fish stew	Tomato and stock	Cod, prawns	35 minutes
Cullen skink	Milk and potato	Smoked haddock	35 minutes
Bouillabaisse-style	Tomato, saffron, orange	Mixed fish and shellfish	45 minutes

HOT POT, BOILING LIQUID AND ALLERGENS

Hot pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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.

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

Smoked haddock chowder

40 minutes | 4 portions | a creamy, layered chowder

A thick, comforting soup. Poach the smoked haddock in the milk first so the milk takes on its flavour, then use it for the base. Keep the potato in neat cubes so it holds its shape, and finish with sweetcorn and a splash of cream.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

400 g	undyed smoked haddock
500 ml	whole milk
30 g	butter
1	onion, chopped
1	celery stick, chopped
400 g	floury potatoes, cut into 1.5 cm cubes
300 ml	low-salt fish stock
150 g	sweetcorn
100 ml	double cream
2 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Poach the haddock in the milk for **6 to 8 minutes,** lift out, flake it (no skin or bones) and keep the milk.
2. Soften the onion and celery in the butter for 8 minutes. Add the potato, the stock and the poaching milk, and simmer for **12 minutes** until the potato is just tender.
3. Add the sweetcorn and cream, heat gently for 3 minutes, fold in the fish and parsley, and season carefully.

HOT MILK, HOT POT 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 pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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 and sulphites.

LEVEL 2 · TOMATO

A tomato fish stew

40 minutes | 4 portions | layering fish in a tomato broth

A simple, bright stew in the Mediterranean style. Cook the base until sweet, simmer the tomato until it thickens, then add the fish in two stages. Serve with crusty bread.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1	onion, sliced
1	fennel bulb, sliced
3	garlic cloves, sliced
400 g	tinned chopped tomatoes
400 ml	low-salt fish stock
1	strip of orange peel
500 g	firm white fish (cod or hake), in large chunks
200 g	raw king prawns
2 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Soften the onion and fennel in the oil for 8 minutes, add the garlic for 1 minute, then the tomatoes, stock and orange peel. Simmer for **15 minutes.**
2. Add the fish and simmer very gently for **5 minutes**, then the prawns for **2 to 3 minutes** until pink.
3. Season, scatter with parsley, remove the peel and serve with bread.

HOT POT, SHELLFISH AND ALLERGENS

Hot pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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.

LEVEL 2 · SCOTTISH

Cullen skink

40 minutes | 4 portions | a simple smoked-fish soup

A Scottish classic from Cullen on the Moray coast. Smoked haddock, potato, onion and milk, then partly mashed so the soup thickens by itself. Keep the pieces of fish whole for the best texture.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

400 g	undyed smoked haddock
500 ml	whole milk
30 g	butter
1	onion, finely chopped
400 g	floury potatoes, diced
300 ml	water
2 tbsp	chopped chives
1	bay leaf

1. Poach the haddock in the milk with the bay leaf for **6 to 8 minutes.** Lift out, flake it, and strain and keep the milk.
2. Soften the onion in the butter for 8 minutes, add the potato, the milk and the water, and simmer for **15 minutes** until tender.
3. Mash roughly with a masher to thicken, return the fish, warm gently, season and scatter with chives.

> **HOT MILK, HOT POT 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 pot and boiling stew:** a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

> **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 milk.

LEVEL 3 · MEDITERRANEAN

A bouillabaisse-style stew with no wine

55 minutes | 4 portions | a rich stew with saffron and orange

The French stew of Marseille, built with saffron, orange peel and tomato. Without the usual wine or pastis it still tastes bright, because the stock, tomato and lemon provide the acidity. Use several kinds of fish, firm first and delicate last.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

3 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1	onion, sliced
1	leek, sliced
1	fennel bulb, sliced
4	garlic cloves, sliced
400 g	tinned chopped tomatoes
800 ml	low-salt fish stock
1 pinch	saffron strands
1	strip of orange peel
400 g	firm white fish (cod, hake or monkfish), chunked
300 g	mussels, scrubbed and debearded
200 g	raw king prawns
1	lemon, juice

1. Soften the onion, leek and fennel in the oil for 10 minutes, add the garlic, then the tomatoes, stock, saffron and orange peel. Simmer for **20 minutes.**
2. Add the firm fish and simmer for **5 minutes,** then the mussels (cover the pot) and prawns for **3 to 4 minutes** until the shells open and the prawns are pink. Discard any unopened mussels.
3. Add the lemon juice, taste, and serve in wide bowls with bread.

> **HOT POT, SHELLFISH SAFETY AND ALLERGENS**

Hot pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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.

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.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Adding fish early or late

Texture.

1. Make two small pots, adding the fish at the start of one and at the end of the other.

Look for: Fish added early breaks up and turns dry; fish added at the end stays in tender flakes.

EXPERIMENT

Firm and delicate fish together

Timing.

1. Add cod and plaice to a pot at the same moment.

Look for: The delicate plaice breaks apart while the cod holds. Add delicate fish last.

EXPERIMENT

Cream or milk

Richness.

1. Finish one chowder with cream and one with only milk.

Look for: Cream gives a velvety richness; milk gives a lighter, cleaner flavour.

EXPERIMENT

Saffron or turmeric

Colour and flavour.

1. Colour two small pots, one with saffron and one with turmeric.

Look for: Saffron gives a subtle, honeyed flavour; turmeric gives a stronger yellow but an earthy taste.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Smoked haddock chowder				
Tomato fish stew				
Cullen skink				
Bouillabaisse-style stew				
Adding fish early or late				
Firm and delicate fish together				
Cream or milk				
Saffron or turmeric				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish falls apart	Boiled hard or stirred	Simmer gently; stir as little as possible
Rubbery prawns	Cooked too long	Add at the end; stop when pink
Thin chowder	Not enough potato or milk reduced	Mash a few potatoes into the soup
Bland stew	Under-seasoned or weak stock	Add salt, lemon and a pinch of saffron
Curdled milk	Boiled with acid	Keep it below a simmer; add lemon at the end
Gritty mussels	Not cleaned	Scrub and rinse; discard open ones

HOT POT, SHELLFISH AND LEFTOVERS

Hot pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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.

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 build a stew in layers.
- ☐ I can poach smoked fish in milk.
- ☐ I can add fish in the right order.
- ☐ I can keep a stew at a gentle simmer.
- ☐ I know which fish are firm and which are delicate.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 4 is Fish Curries: building a curry for fish that is fragile.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 4 · Fish Curries

SKILL GOAL

Build a flavoursome sauce first, then add fragile fish at the end so it stays in pieces.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A curry is two jobs: first make a **sauce,** then **poach the fish in it.** The sauce takes 20 minutes or more and gets better with time; the fish needs 4 to 6 minutes, so it goes in last. Fragile fish breaks apart if stirred or boiled, so use big chunks, simmer gently and shake the pan rather than stirring. For the base itself see Cooking Skills: Sauces 2, chapter 3, and for rice Cooking Skills: Rice 1, chapter 3.

Three styles here: a **spiced tomato base** (North Indian style), a **Thai-style coconut** curry with paste, and a **molee** (a mild, creamy Keralan stew with ginger, green chilli and coconut). The quick prawn curry is the one for a weeknight. All are alcohol-free, and chilli can be left out for children.



Figure 4. Spices, base, liquid and fish: the order of a fish curry.

The method

- **Fry the spices in oil** for 30 to 60 seconds until fragrant, but never let them burn.
- **Build the base:** cook the onion, garlic, ginger and tomato until soft and the oil separates.

- **Add the liquid** (coconut milk, stock or yogurt) and simmer 10 minutes to make the sauce.
- **Add the fish last** in big chunks and simmer gently for 4 to 6 minutes without stirring.
- **Finish with acid and herbs,** such as lime, lemon, tamarind or coriander.

CURRY	BASE	FISH	TIME (APPROXIMATE)
Spiced-base fish curry	Tomato and onion	Cod or haddock	35 minutes
Thai-style coconut	Coconut and curry paste	Firm white fish	30 minutes
Keralan-style molee	Coconut, ginger and green chilli	Any firm fish	35 minutes
Quick prawn curry	Tinned tomato and spices	Raw king prawns	20 minutes

SPICES, HOT COCONUT MILK AND ALLERGENS

Spices and hot oil: whole spices pop and spit in hot oil, and ground spices burn in seconds, turning bitter. Keep a lid or splash guard to hand, add the next ingredient the moment the spices smell fragrant, and keep your face back from the pan.

Hot coconut milk: coconut milk spits when it first hits a hot pan and boils over easily. Add it slowly, stir, and keep the heat at a gentle simmer, never a hard boil, or it splits and turns oily.

Chilli and spices: chilli can sting skin and eyes, so wash your hands well after chopping it and don't touch your face. Add heat in small steps, and keep portions for children mild.

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

A fish curry on a spiced base

40 minutes | 4 portions | a tomato and spice base for fish

A straightforward weeknight curry. Fry whole cumin and mustard seeds, soften an onion, add tomato and ground spices, and simmer to a thick sauce before the fish goes in. Cod, pollock or haddock all work.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

3 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1 tsp	cumin seeds
1 tsp	mustard seeds
1	onion, finely chopped
3	garlic cloves, grated
2 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
1 tsp	ground coriander
1 tsp	turmeric
½ tsp	mild chilli powder
400 g	tinned chopped tomatoes
150 ml	water
600 g	firm white fish, in large chunks
1	lemon, juice
2 tbsp	chopped coriander

1. Fry the cumin and mustard seeds in the oil for **30 seconds** until they pop, then add the onion and cook for 8 minutes. Add the garlic, ginger and ground spices for 1 minute.
2. Add the tomatoes and water and simmer for **15 minutes** until thick. Season.
3. Add the fish and simmer very gently for **5 to 6 minutes.** Finish with lemon juice and coriander, and serve with rice.

HOT OIL, SPICES AND ALLERGENS

Spices and hot oil: whole spices pop and spit in hot oil, and ground spices burn in seconds, turning bitter. Keep a lid or splash guard to hand, add the next ingredient the moment the spices smell fragrant, and keep your face back from the pan.

Chilli and spices: chilli can sting skin and eyes, so wash your hands well after chopping it and don't touch your face. Add heat in small steps, and keep portions for children mild.

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.

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.

LEVEL 2 · THAI-STYLE

A Thai-style coconut fish curry

35 minutes | 4 portions | frying a paste and making a coconut sauce

Fry the curry paste in a little oil first to wake it up, then add the coconut milk and simmer. Many pastes contain shrimp paste, so check the label if anyone has a shellfish allergy. Lime and Thai basil at the end make it taste fresh.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
3 tbsp	green or red Thai curry paste
400 ml	tinned coconut milk
150 ml	low-salt fish stock
1	red pepper, sliced
100 g	green beans, trimmed and halved
600 g	firm white fish, in large chunks
1	lime, juice
1 handful	Thai basil or basil leaves

1. Fry the paste in the oil for **1 minute** until fragrant, then add the coconut milk and stock, bring to a gentle simmer and cook for **8 minutes.**
2. Add the pepper and beans and cook for 4 minutes, then add the fish and simmer gently for **5 minutes.**
3. Finish with lime juice and basil, and serve with rice.

> **HOT COCONUT MILK, SHELLFISH PASTE AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Hot coconut milk:** coconut milk spits when it first hits a hot pan and boils over easily. Add it slowly, stir, and keep the heat at a gentle simmer, never a hard boil, or it splits and turns oily.
>
> **Spices and hot oil:** whole spices pop and spit in hot oil, and ground spices burn in seconds, turning bitter. Keep a lid or splash guard to hand, add the next ingredient the moment the spices smell fragrant, and keep your face back from the pan.

> **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.
>
> **Allergens:** contains fish and often crustaceans (shrimp paste in the curry paste).

LEVEL 3 · KERALAN

A Keralan-style fish molee

40 minutes | 4 portions | a mild, creamy coconut stew

A gentle, creamy stew from Kerala: ginger, green chilli, onion and turmeric in coconut milk, with fish added at the very end. It is mild and good for family tables. Use curry leaves if you can find them.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1 tsp	mustard seeds
10	curry leaves (optional)
1	onion, thinly sliced
2 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
3	garlic cloves, sliced
1	green chilli, sliced (deseed for mild)
½ tsp	turmeric
400 ml	tinned coconut milk
600 g	firm white fish, in large chunks
1	lime, juice

1. Fry the mustard seeds and curry leaves in the oil for **30 seconds.** Add the onion, ginger, garlic and chilli and cook gently for 8 minutes without browning. Stir in the turmeric.
2. Add the coconut milk and simmer very gently for **10 minutes**, never boiling hard.
3. Slide in the fish and simmer for **5 to 6 minutes** until it flakes. Season, add the lime juice and serve with rice.

HOT COCONUT MILK, SPICES AND CHILLI

Hot coconut milk: coconut milk spits when it first hits a hot pan and boils over easily. Add it slowly, stir, and keep the heat at a gentle simmer, never a hard boil, or it splits and turns oily.

Spices and hot oil: whole spices pop and spit in hot oil, and ground spices burn in seconds,

turning bitter. Keep a lid or splash guard to hand, add the next ingredient the moment the spices smell fragrant, and keep your face back from the pan.

Chilli and spices: chilli can sting skin and eyes, so wash your hands well after chopping it and don't touch your face. Add heat in small steps, and keep portions for children mild.

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.

LEVEL 3 · QUICK

A quick prawn curry

25 minutes | 4 portions | a fast curry for shellfish

Raw king prawns need only 2 to 3 minutes, so the sauce comes first. A tin of tomatoes and a handful of spices make a good quick base. This is the one to make on a busy evening.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2 tbsp	rapeseed oil
1	onion, finely chopped
3	garlic cloves, grated
1 tbsp	grated fresh ginger
2 tsp	garam masala
1 tsp	ground coriander
½ tsp	turmeric
400 g	tinned chopped tomatoes
100 ml	water
500 g	raw king prawns, peeled
3 tbsp	plain yogurt
2 tbsp	chopped coriander

1. Soften the onion in the oil for 6 minutes, add the garlic, ginger and spices for **1 minute,** then the tomatoes and water. Simmer for **12 minutes** until thick.
2. Add the prawns and cook for **2 to 3 minutes** until they are pink and curled.
3. Take off the heat, stir in the yogurt and coriander, and serve with rice.

> **SHELLFISH, SPICES 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.

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.

Spices and hot oil: whole spices pop and spit in hot oil, and ground spices burn in seconds, turning bitter. Keep a lid or splash guard to hand, add the next ingredient the moment the spices smell fragrant, and keep your face back from the pan.

Allergens: contains crustaceans (prawns) and milk.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Coconut milk or yogurt

Richness.

1. Finish two small pots, one with coconut milk and one with yogurt.

Look for: Coconut milk gives a rounded, sweet richness; yogurt gives a sharper, tangier sauce that can split if boiled.

EXPERIMENT

Fish added early or late

Texture.

1. Add fish to one pot at the start and to another for the last 5 minutes.

Look for: Early fish breaks up and goes dry; fish added late stays in tender flakes.

EXPERIMENT

Whole or ground spices

Flavour.

1. Make two small bases, one with whole cumin seeds and one with ground cumin.

Look for: Whole seeds give pops of flavour and aroma; ground gives an even, blended taste. Ground burns faster.

EXPERIMENT

Tamarind or lemon

Sourness.

1. Finish two pots, one with tamarind and one with lemon.

Look for: Tamarind gives a deeper, fruity sourness; lemon gives a clean, bright one.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Spiced fish curry				
Thai-style coconut curry				
Fish molee				
Quick prawn curry				
Coconut milk or yogurt				
Fish added early or late				
Whole or ground spices				
Tamarind or lemon				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish breaks up	Stirred or boiled	Shake the pan; simmer gently
Split or oily coconut sauce	Boiled hard	Keep to a gentle simmer
Bitter spices	Burnt in the pan	Fry for 30 to 60 seconds only; add liquid at once
Thin sauce	Not reduced enough	Simmer the base longer before the fish
Too hot	Too much chilli	Add yogurt or coconut milk; deseed next time
Rubbery prawns	Overcooked	Add at the end; 2 to 3 minutes only

SPICES, SHELLFISH AND LEFTOVERS

Spices and hot oil: whole spices pop and spit in hot oil, and ground spices burn in seconds, turning bitter. Keep a lid or splash guard to hand, add the next ingredient the moment the spices smell fragrant, and keep your face back from the pan.

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.

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 fry spices without burning them.
- ☐ I can build a curry sauce before the fish.
- ☐ I can add fish last so it stays in pieces.
- ☐ I can balance a curry with acid.
- ☐ I can make a curry mild enough for children.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 5 is Crab and Shellfish in Depth: preparing crab, langoustines and clams.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 5 · Crab and Shellfish in Depth

SKILL GOAL

Use cooked crab, clams and langoustines well, and cook them without wasting a scrap.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Shellfish needs more care than fish, but the rewards are large. **Cooked crab** is sold as a whole dressed crab or as a tub of picked meat. **White meat** (claws and legs) is sweet and firm; **brown meat** (the body) is rich, creamy and strong. **Clams** are bought live in their shells and cooked until they open. **Langoustines** (Scottish langoustines, also called Dublin Bay prawns) and **lobster tails** are cooked quickly, and this course uses ones that are already cooked, frozen or prepared. It does not teach killing live crustaceans.

Keep the cooking short, the seasoning light and the lemon close. Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 6 covers prawns, mussels, scallops and squid, and chapter 7 covers grilling. For the mayonnaise see Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 7, and for pasta cooking Cooking Skills: Pasta 1, chapter 6. No wine is used; stock, lemon and the clam liquor give the savoury depth.



Figure 5. Crab: sweet white meat, rich brown meat, then toast, cakes or pasta.

The method

- **Buy cooked crab fresh and cold,** and use it within a day.

- **Taste the white and brown separately,** then season and combine to your liking.
- **Soak clams in cold salted water** for 20 minutes to release grit, then rinse.
- **Cook clams until they open,** and throw away any that stay shut.
- **Finish with acid and fresh herbs,** never long cooking, because shellfish toughens fast.

SHELLFISH	BUY	COOK	DONE WHEN
Cooked crab	Dressed or picked	Not cooked, just seasoned	Cold, fresh-smelling
Clams	Live, shut shells	3 to 5 minutes	Shells wide open
Langoustines	Cooked or frozen	2 to 3 minutes under the grill	Hot, flesh opaque
Lobster tail	Prepared, frozen or fresh	5 to 6 minutes under the grill	Flesh opaque and firm

SHELLFISH SAFETY, CRAB SHELL, ALLERGENS AND HOT GRILL

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.

Crab shell and cooked crab: buy crab that is already cooked and dressed or picked, from a fishmonger you trust, keep it below 5°C and eat it within a day. Crab shell is sharp and cracking it sends splinters, so wear a cloth or gloves and work on a board. Brown meat is rich and strongly flavoured; discard the grey feathery gills and the stomach sac.

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 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.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Crab on toast

15 minutes | 2 portions | seasoning and balancing crab

The simplest way to enjoy crab. Mix the white and brown meat with lemon, a little mayonnaise and chives, then pile onto well-toasted sourdough. Season carefully, because good crab needs little.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

150 g	cooked white crab meat
50 g	cooked brown crab meat
2 tbsp	mayonnaise
1	lemon, zest and juice
1 tbsp	chopped chives
2	thick slices of sourdough
1 pinch	cayenne or mild chilli powder

1. Check the white meat for stray shell with your fingers. Mix the white meat with half the mayonnaise, lemon zest, juice and chives.
2. Season the brown meat with the rest of the mayonnaise, a little lemon and the cayenne, and beat until smooth.
3. Toast the bread, spread with brown meat, pile on white meat and serve at once.

COOKED CRAB, SHELL AND ALLERGENS

Crab shell and cooked crab: buy crab that is already cooked and dressed or picked, from a fishmonger you trust, keep it below 5°C and eat it within a day. Crab shell is sharp and cracking it sends splinters, so wear a cloth or gloves and work on a board. Brown meat is rich and strongly flavoured; discard the grey feathery gills and the stomach sac.

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.

Allergens: contains crustaceans (crab), egg (mayonnaise), gluten and sometimes mustard.

LEVEL 2 · FRY

Crab cakes

45 minutes plus chilling | 4 portions (8 small cakes) | binding delicate crab

Crab is so delicate that it needs just enough binding to hold. Use mashed potato or fresh breadcrumbs, chill the cakes well, and fry gently. Don't overmix, or the crab turns to paste.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

300 g	cooked white crab meat
100 g	cold mashed potato
2	spring onions, finely sliced
1	egg, beaten
1 tbsp	mayonnaise
1	lemon, zest and juice
60 g	panko breadcrumbs
3 tbsp	rapeseed oil

1. Gently mix the crab, mash, spring onions, half the egg, mayonnaise and lemon. Shape into 8 cakes about 2 cm thick. Chill for **30 minutes.**
2. Brush with the remaining egg and press into the panko.
3. Fry in the hot oil over a medium heat for **3 minutes a side** until golden and hot through. Serve with lemon.

> **HOT OIL, CRAB 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.
>
> **Crab shell and cooked crab:** buy crab that is already cooked and dressed or picked, from a fishmonger you trust, keep it below 5°C and eat it within a day. Crab shell is sharp and cracking it sends splinters, so wear a cloth or gloves and work on a board. Brown meat is rich and strongly flavoured; discard the grey feathery gills and the stomach sac.
>
> **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.
>
> **Allergens:** contains crustaceans (crab), egg and gluten.

LEVEL 2 · PASTA

Clams with garlic and chilli spaghetti (no wine)

25 minutes | 2 portions | steaming clams and finishing pasta in their juices

Spaghetti alle vongole usually uses white wine. Here a splash of pasta water and lemon give the sauce its lift. Soak the clams first for no grit, and add them to a hot pan so they open in a few minutes.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

500 g	fresh clams, soaked in cold salted water for 20 minutes
200 g	dried spaghetti
3 tbsp	rapeseed oil
3	garlic cloves, sliced
1	red chilli, finely sliced (deseed for mild)
100 ml	pasta cooking water
1	lemon, juice
2 tbsp	chopped parsley

1. Boil the spaghetti in well-salted water for 2 minutes less than the packet says. Rinse the clams and discard any that stay open when tapped.
2. Warm the oil with the garlic and chilli for 1 minute, add the clams and 100 ml pasta water, cover and cook for **3 to 5 minutes** until they open. Discard any that stay shut.
3. Add the drained spaghetti and toss for 1 minute, then the lemon juice and parsley, and serve at once.

SHELLFISH SAFETY, HOT WATER 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.

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 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.

Chilli and spices: chilli can sting skin and eyes, so wash your hands well after chopping it and don't touch your face. Add heat in small steps, and keep portions for children mild.

LEVEL 3 · GRILL

Grilled langoustines or lobster tail with garlic butter

20 minutes | 2 portions | quickly grilling prepared crustaceans

Buy cooked or frozen langoustines, or prepared lobster tails with the shell split on top. Heat them under a very hot grill with garlic butter just until hot and opaque, because they are already cooked or only need 5 minutes. A lemon wedge and bread complete it.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

6	cooked langoustines, or 2 prepared lobster tails (defrosted)
50 g	soft butter
2	garlic cloves, grated
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1	lemon, in wedges
1 pinch	flaked sea salt

1. Heat the grill to high. Mash the butter with the garlic, parsley and salt.
2. Split the langoustines lengthways (or lay the lobster tails flesh up) on a tray, and spread with garlic butter.
3. Grill for **2 to 3 minutes** (langoustines) or **5 to 6 minutes** (lobster tail) until hot and opaque. Serve with lemon.

HOT GRILL, SHELL 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.

Crab shell and cooked crab: buy crab that is already cooked and dressed or picked, from a fishmonger you trust, keep it below 5°C and eat it within a day. Crab shell is sharp and cracking it sends splinters, so wear a cloth or gloves and work on a board. Brown meat is rich and strongly flavoured; discard the grey feathery gills and the stomach sac.

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.

> **Allergens:** contains crustaceans and milk.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

White or brown meat

Flavour.

1. Taste white and brown meat on their own, then mixed 3 to 1.

Look for: White is sweet and clean; brown is rich and strong. Mixed, the brown gives depth without overpowering.

EXPERIMENT

Cooked crab bought or cooked

Convenience.

1. Compare a shop-bought dressed crab with freshly boiled crab if your fishmonger sells it.

Look for: Bought cooked crab is easy and reliable; freshly cooked is a little sweeter but needs more work and care.

EXPERIMENT

Clams soaked or not

Grit.

1. Cook half the clams after soaking and half without.

Look for: The soaked clams are clean; the unsoaked ones have sand in the sauce.

EXPERIMENT

Butter flavoured early or late

Garlic.

1. Cook garlic butter for 5 minutes on one tray and add it only for the last minute on another.

Look for: Early garlic burns and turns bitter; late garlic butter melts into a fresh, mild sauce.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Crab on toast				
Crab cakes				
Clam spaghetti				
Grilled langoustines				
White or brown meat				
Cooked crab bought or cooked				
Clams soaked or not				
Butter flavoured early or late				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Crab cakes fall apart	Too wet or not chilled	Use cold dry mash; chill for 30 minutes
Gritty clams	Not soaked	Soak in cold salted water for 20 minutes and rinse

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Clams won't open	Dead or pan not hot enough	Discard those that stay shut; cook on a high heat with a lid
Tough lobster or langoustine	Overcooked	Grill only until hot and opaque
Crab tastes flat	Under-seasoned	Add lemon, salt and a little cayenne
Shell in the crab	Missed	Check by hand on a plate before using

SHELLFISH, GRILL 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 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.

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 season cooked crab.
- ☐ I can tell white from brown meat.
- ☐ I can soak and cook clams.
- ☐ I can grill prepared shellfish quickly.
- ☐ I know when to throw clams away.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 6 is Curing and Salting: salt, sugar and time.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 6 · Curing and Salting

SKILL GOAL

Preserve and flavour fish with salt, sugar, vinegar and time, and do it safely.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Curing is the oldest way to keep fish. **Salt** draws out water so the flesh firms up and bacteria struggle, while **sugar** softens the taste and helps the texture. A weight presses it flat, and **time** does the work. Gravlax (Swedish for buried salmon) is cured in salt, sugar and dill for 24 to 48 hours; pickled herring is held in vinegar and spices; salt cod is dried in salt for days and soaked back to life; potted prawns are sealed under spiced butter.

Curing is not cooking, so the raw-fish rules matter. Gravlax and pickled herring should be made from **fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days** (general guidance, to kill parasites), and are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system. Raw fish is stored cold and eaten within the days given. Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 8 covers freezing fish well. No wine, beer or spirits are used; vinegar and lemon replace them.



Figure 6. Cure, weight, time, slice: the steps of gravlax.

The method

- **Freeze the fish first** (at least 7 days at -20°C), then defrost it in the fridge.
- **Mix the cure** (roughly equal parts salt and sugar by weight) and cover every surface.
- **Weigh it down** with a tray and tins so it gives up water evenly.
- **Turn it and baste** with the liquid every 12 hours.
- **Rinse, pat dry and slice** thinly with a long, sharp knife at an angle, keeping everything below 5°C.

CURE	FISH	TIME (APPROXIMATE)	KEEPS (FRIDGE)
Gravlax	Salmon	36 to 48 hours	Up to 4 days
Pickled herring	Herring or mackerel	24 hours, then pickled	Up to 1 week
Salt cod	Cod	2 days salting, 24 hours soaking	Soaked: eat within 2 days
Potted prawns	Cooked brown shrimp	30 minutes plus setting	Up to 3 days

RAW CURED FISH, HOT VINEGAR AND ALLERGENS

Cured and pickled fish are not cooked: gravlax and pickled herring are cured, not cooked, so they can carry parasites and bacteria. Use fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days (general guidance) or that the fishmonger says is sushi grade, keep it below 5°C, and eat it within the stated days. These dishes are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system.

Hot vinegar and brine: hot pickling liquid scalds and the fumes sting your eyes. Pour it carefully with the pan well away from your face, cool it before it goes near the fish, and sterilise jars by washing them in hot soapy water and warming them in the oven.

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

Gravlax

20 minutes plus 36 to 48 hours | 8 starter portions | the salt, sugar and weight cure

The simplest cure there is. A thick centre-cut piece of salmon, covered with an even mix of salt, sugar and plenty of dill, pressed for two days. Slice thinly and serve on rye with a mustard and dill sauce. Use fish that has been frozen for at least 7 days.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

600 g	centre-cut salmon fillet, skin on, previously frozen and defrosted
50 g	coarse sea salt
50 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	crushed white peppercorns
1 large bunch	fresh dill, chopped
4	slices of rye bread, to serve

1. Mix the salt, sugar, pepper and dill. Lay the fillet skin-side down on cling film, cover the flesh evenly with the cure and wrap tightly.
2. Put in a dish in the fridge, set a tray and two tins on top as a weight, and leave for **36 to 48 hours,** turning every 12 hours and basting with the liquid.
3. Rinse off the cure, pat dry and slice very thinly at an angle. Eat within about 4 days.

CURED RAW FISH AND ALLERGENS

Cured and pickled fish are not cooked: gravlax and pickled herring are cured, not cooked, so they can carry parasites and bacteria. Use fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days (general guidance) or that the fishmonger says is sushi grade, keep it below 5°C, and eat it within the stated days. These dishes are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system.

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.

Allergens: contains fish and gluten (rye bread).

LEVEL 2 · PICKLE

Pickled herring (alcohol-free)

30 minutes plus 24 hours | 6 starter portions | salting then pickling in vinegar

Pickled herring is a Scandinavian standard. Salt the fillets for a few hours, then cover them in a sweet-sour vinegar brine with onion, carrot and spices. It uses no wine. Use fish that has been frozen for at least 7 days, or buy ready-salted herring fillets.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

500 g	herring or mackerel fillets, previously frozen and defrosted
2 tbsp	coarse sea salt
200 ml	white wine vinegar
200 ml	water
100 g	caster sugar
1	onion, thinly sliced
1	carrot, thinly sliced
2	bay leaves
1 tsp	mustard seeds
6	white peppercorns

1. Sprinkle the fillets with the salt, leave in the fridge for **2 hours,** then rinse and pat dry. Cut into 3 cm pieces.
2. Heat the vinegar, water, sugar, bay, mustard seeds and peppercorns until the sugar dissolves, then cool completely.
3. Layer the fish, onion and carrot in a clean jar, cover with the cold brine and refrigerate for **24 hours.** Eat within about 1 week.

> **CURED RAW FISH, HOT VINEGAR AND ALLERGENS**
>
> **Cured and pickled fish are not cooked:** gravlax and pickled herring are cured, not cooked, so they can carry parasites and bacteria. Use fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days (general guidance) or that the fishmonger says is sushi grade, keep it below 5°C, and eat it within the stated days. These dishes are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or

anyone with a weakened immune system.

Hot vinegar and brine: hot pickling liquid scalds and the fumes sting your eyes. Pour it carefully with the pan well away from your face, cool it before it goes near the fish, and sterilise jars by washing them in hot soapy water and warming them in the oven.

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, mustard and sulphites (vinegar).

LEVEL 3 · SALT COD

Salt cod and a brandade

50 minutes plus 24 hours | 6 starter portions | rescuing dried cod and mashing it with potato

Salt cod (dried, salted cod from a good deli) keeps for months. Soak it for 24 hours in cold water, changing the water, then poach and beat it into a creamy brandade with potato, garlic, milk and olive oil. Serve warm with toast.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

400 g	salt cod
300 g	floury potatoes, peeled
250 ml	whole milk
3	garlic cloves
80 ml	olive oil, warmed
1	lemon, juice
1 pinch	nutmeg

1. Soak the salt cod in cold water for **24 hours** in the fridge, changing the water 3 times. Boil the potatoes for 20 minutes and drain.
2. Poach the cod and garlic in the milk for **8 to 10 minutes,** lift out, flake (no skin or bones) and keep the milk.
3. Beat the cod and potato with the warm olive oil, enough milk to make a creamy mash, the lemon juice and nutmeg. Season sparingly, as the cod is salty.

HOT MILK, BONES 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.

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

LEVEL 3 · POTTED

Potted prawns

30 minutes plus setting | 4 starter portions | sealing cooked shellfish under spiced butter

A British classic: cooked brown shrimp or small prawns warmed through in spiced butter, packed into ramekins and sealed under a layer of clarified butter. Serve with toast and lemon. Because the shellfish is already cooked, this is not a raw dish.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

200 g	cooked peeled brown shrimp or small prawns
125 g	butter
1 pinch	ground mace or nutmeg
1 pinch	cayenne pepper
1	lemon, juice
4	slices of toast, to serve

1. Melt the butter gently, skim the froth, and pour off the clear butter, leaving the milk solids behind. Keep a third of it aside.
2. Warm the prawns in the remaining butter with the mace, cayenne and lemon juice for 2 minutes.
3. Pack into 4 small ramekins, press flat and pour the reserved clear butter over the top. Chill for **2 hours** and eat within 2 to 3 days.

POTTED FOODS, HOT BUTTER AND ALLERGENS

Potted and sealed foods: a layer of butter keeps air out but does not make food safe for long. Keep potted prawns in the fridge below 5°C, eat within 2 to 3 days, and throw them away if the butter looks cloudy or the smell is sour.

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.

Allergens: contains crustaceans, milk and gluten (toast).

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Salt-to-sugar ratio

Taste.

1. Cure two small pieces of salmon, one with equal salt and sugar and one with twice as much salt.

Look for: Equal parts gives a balanced, mild cure; more salt is firmer and saltier, and shrinks the fish more.

EXPERIMENT

Weighted or not

Texture.

1. Cure two pieces, one under a weight and one without.

Look for: The weighted fish is firm and dense; the unweighted one is softer and cures unevenly.

EXPERIMENT

24 or 48 hours

Firmness.

1. Slice a piece cured for 24 hours and another for 48.

Look for: At 24 hours it is soft and mildly cured; at 48 it is firmer, saltier and more translucent.

EXPERIMENT

Pickled in vinegar or lemon

Sourness.

1. Pickle two small portions, one in vinegar brine and one in lemon juice and sugar.

Look for: Vinegar gives a sharp, long-lasting pickle; lemon gives a fresher flavour that keeps for less time.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Gravlax				
Pickled herring				
Salt cod and brandade				
Potted prawns				
Salt-to-sugar ratio				
Weighted or not				
24 or 48 hours				
Pickled in vinegar or lemon				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Gravlax too salty	Cured too long or too much salt	Reduce the salt or cure for 36 hours; rinse well
Fish slimy	Old fish or warm fridge	Use fresh fish; keep below 5°C
Cure is watery	Normal	Baste, turn and keep the dish level

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Brandade is too salty	Salt cod not soaked enough	Soak longer with more water changes
Potted prawns go cloudy	Butter overheated	Warm gently and clarify the butter
Pickle too sharp	Too much vinegar	Add more sugar or dilute the brine

CURED FISH, STORAGE AND LEFTOVERS

Cured and pickled fish are not cooked: gravlax and pickled herring are cured, not cooked, so they can carry parasites and bacteria. Use fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days (general guidance) or that the fishmonger says is sushi grade, keep it below 5°C, and eat it within the stated days. These dishes are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system.

Potted and sealed foods: a layer of butter keeps air out but does not make food safe for long. Keep potted prawns in the fridge below 5°C, eat within 2 to 3 days, and throw them away if the butter looks cloudy or the smell is sour.

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 know why fish is frozen before curing.
- ☐ I can make a salt and sugar cure.
- ☐ I can slice cured fish thinly.
- ☐ I can pickle fish without alcohol.
- ☐ I know who should avoid raw cured fish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 7 is Smoking at Home: hot-smoking on the hob with wood chips or tea.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 7 · Smoking at Home

SKILL GOAL

Hot-smoke fish on the hob safely, and use smoked fish well.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Hot-smoking cooks fish gently in a closed pot filled with smoke. You can do it on the hob with a wok or deep pan, a sheet of foil, a rack and a lid, using wood chips or a mix of black tea, rice and sugar. The fish takes 8 to 12 minutes, comes out moist and flaky, and tastes wonderful. It is quite different from **cold-smoking** (done below 30°C for days), which this course does not teach, because it needs controlled equipment and carries a listeria risk.

Brine the fish briefly in salt and sugar first for flavour and a firmer texture, dry it so smoke sticks, and keep the lid sealed. Test with a thermometer: at least 63°C in the thickest part (general guidance). Smoking makes smoke and the smell lingers, so open the windows and use the extractor. For fish brining ideas see Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 6, and for grilling kippers Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 7.



Figure 7. A hob smoker: pan, foil, smoking mix, rack and a tight lid.

The method

- **Brine the fish** for 20 to 30 minutes in salt and sugar water, then pat completely dry.

- **Line a wok with foil,** add the smoking mix, and set a rack above it with the fish on top.
- **Heat until the mix smokes,** then lower the heat to medium, put the lid on and seal gaps with foil.
- **Smoke for 8 to 12 minutes,** turning off the heat and resting the lid on for 5 minutes.
- **Check the thermometer:** 63°C in the thickest part, flesh opaque and flaking.

SMOKE	FUEL	FISH	TIME (APPROXIMATE)
Wok smoking	Wood chips	Salmon fillet	8 to 10 minutes
Tea smoking	Black tea, rice, sugar	Trout fillet	8 to 10 minutes
Kippers (ready-smoked)	None, just grilled	Kippers	4 to 5 minutes
Smoked trout salad	Ready-smoked fish	Smoked trout	Cold

SMOKE, FIRE, HOT FOIL AND ALLERGENS

Smoke, ventilation and fire: hob smoking makes a lot of smoke. Open a window, switch the extractor to full, check that your smoke alarm works, and never leave the pan unattended. Stop at once if flames appear: turn off the heat and keep the lid on to smother them. Do not use a non-stick pan for smoking.

Hot-smoked means cooked: this course teaches hot-smoking only, which cooks the fish. It is done when the thickest part reaches at least 63°C (general guidance) and the flesh flakes. Cold-smoking at low temperatures is not taught because it needs controlled equipment and carries a listeria risk. Eat home-smoked fish within about 2 days.

Hot smoking mix and foil: the smoking mix gets extremely hot, and the foil-lined pan and lid stay scorching afterwards. Use oven gloves, lift the lid away from your face, and leave the pan to cool on a heatproof surface before tipping the mix into a metal bin or a sink of cold water outdoors.

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

Wok-smoked salmon

40 minutes | 2 portions | setting up a hob smoker

The standard method. Brine the salmon briefly, dry it, and smoke it over wood chips in a foil-lined wok. The smoke sticks best to a dry surface. Keep the lid tight and the heat medium.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	salmon fillets (about 150 g each), skin on
1 tbsp	coarse sea salt
1 tbsp	caster sugar
500 ml	cold water
2 tbsp	wood chips
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Dissolve the salt and sugar in the water, soak the salmon for **20 minutes,** then rinse and pat completely dry.
2. Line a wok with foil, scatter the chips, set a rack above and lay the salmon on it. Heat until smoking, cover tightly and lower to a medium heat.
3. Smoke for **8 to 10 minutes,** then turn off and rest with the lid on for 5 minutes. Check it flakes and reads at least 63°C.

SMOKE, HOT FOIL AND COOKED TEMPERATURE

Smoke, ventilation and fire: hob smoking makes a lot of smoke. Open a window, switch the extractor to full, check that your smoke alarm works, and never leave the pan unattended. Stop at once if flames appear: turn off the heat and keep the lid on to smother them. Do not use a non-stick pan for smoking.

Hot-smoked means cooked: this course teaches hot-smoking only, which cooks the fish. It is done when the thickest part reaches at least 63°C (general guidance) and the flesh flakes. Cold-smoking at low temperatures is not taught because it needs controlled equipment and carries a listeria risk. Eat home-smoked fish within about 2 days.

Hot smoking mix and foil: the smoking mix gets extremely hot, and the foil-lined pan and lid

stay scorching afterwards. Use oven gloves, lift the lid away from your face, and leave the pan to cool on a heatproof surface before tipping the mix into a metal bin or a sink of cold water outdoors.

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 · TEA

Tea-smoked trout

35 minutes | 2 portions | smoking with a pantry mix

No wood chips needed. A mix of black tea, rice and sugar smokes beautifully and tastes faintly sweet. Serve with a squeeze of lemon and new potatoes. It works with any firm fish.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	trout fillets (about 150 g each), skin on
1 tsp	flaked sea salt
3 tbsp	loose black tea
3 tbsp	uncooked long-grain rice
2 tbsp	brown sugar
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Salt the trout, leave for 15 minutes and pat dry. Mix the tea, rice and sugar and spread on a foil-lined wok.
2. Set a rack above, lay the trout on it, heat until the mix smokes and cover tightly over a medium heat.
3. Smoke for **8 to 10 minutes,** then rest with the lid on for 5 minutes. Serve warm or cold with lemon.

SMOKE, HOT FOIL AND ALLERGENS

Smoke, ventilation and fire: hob smoking makes a lot of smoke. Open a window, switch the extractor to full, check that your smoke alarm works, and never leave the pan unattended. Stop at once if flames appear: turn off the heat and keep the lid on to smother them. Do not use a non-stick pan for smoking.

Hot smoking mix and foil: the smoking mix gets extremely hot, and the foil-lined pan and lid stay scorching afterwards. Use oven gloves, lift the lid away from your face, and leave the pan to cool on a heatproof surface before tipping the mix into a metal bin or a sink of cold water outdoors.

Hot-smoked means cooked: this course teaches hot-smoking only, which cooks the fish. It is done when the thickest part reaches at least 63°C (general guidance) and the flesh flakes. Cold-

smoking at low temperatures is not taught because it needs controlled equipment and carries a listeria risk. Eat home-smoked fish within about 2 days.

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 · GRILL

Grilled kippers

15 minutes | 2 portions | finishing ready-smoked fish

A kipper is a split herring that is salted and smoked for you. At breakfast or supper, brush it with butter and grill for a few minutes. Serve with brown bread, butter and lemon, and warn everyone about the fine bones.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	kipper fillets or whole kippers
20 g	butter
1	lemon, in wedges
2	slices of brown bread
1 pinch	black pepper

1. Heat the grill to high. Lay the kippers skin-side down on a lined tray and dot with butter.
2. Grill for **4 to 5 minutes** without turning, until sizzling and hot through.
3. Serve with lemon, pepper and buttered brown bread.

HOT GRILL, BONES AND SMOKED FISH

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.

Smoked and salty fish: kippers and smoked trout are salty, and smoked fish is one to limit if you are pregnant or cooking for young children; check current NHS advice. Kippers have fine bones, so warn everyone.

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.

LEVEL 3 · SALAD

A smoked trout salad

25 minutes | 2 portions | balancing smoky, creamy and fresh flavours

Use your own smoked trout, cooled, or a bought hot-smoked fillet. Flake it over waterside greens with warm potatoes, crisp radishes and a horseradish cream. The smoke is strong, so lemon and cucumber lift it.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	hot-smoked trout, flaked
300 g	baby new potatoes
60 g	watercress or rocket
½	cucumber, sliced
4	radishes, sliced
3 tbsp	crème fraîche
1 tbsp	horseradish sauce
1	lemon, juice
1 tbsp	chopped chives

1. Boil the potatoes for 15 to 20 minutes, drain and halve. Mix the crème fraîche, horseradish and half the lemon juice.
2. Arrange the leaves, cucumber, radishes and warm potatoes on plates.
3. Flake the trout over the top, spoon on the cream, add the rest of the lemon and the chives.

SMOKED FISH, BOILING WATER AND ALLERGENS

Smoked and salty fish: kippers and smoked trout are salty, and smoked fish is one to limit if you are pregnant or cooking for young children; check current NHS advice. Kippers have fine bones, so warn everyone.

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.

> **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, milk and sometimes mustard (horseradish sauce).

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Wood chips or tea

Flavour.

1. Smoke two fillets, one over wood chips and one over tea, rice and sugar.

Look for: Wood gives a deeper, resinous smoke; tea gives a lighter, sweeter and slightly floral one.

EXPERIMENT

Lid sealed or loose

Smoke.

1. Smoke one fillet with a tight lid and another with a loose one.

Look for: The sealed pan flavours the fish well; the loose lid lets the smoke escape and the fish is plain.

EXPERIMENT

Brined or not

Moisture.

1. Smoke one brined and one unbrined fillet.

Look for: The brined fillet is moist and well seasoned; the unbrined one is drier and blander.

EXPERIMENT

Resting

Texture.

1. Slice one fillet straight away and another after resting with the lid on for 5 minutes.

Look for: The rested fillet is more even and moist, and the smoky flavour settles into the flesh.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Wok-smoked salmon				
Tea-smoked trout				
Grilled kippers				
Smoked trout salad				
Wood chips or tea				
Lid sealed or loose				
Brined or not				
Resting				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Fish tastes bitter or sooty	Too much smoke or burnt mix	Use less mix; keep the heat medium
Fish not smoky	Lid loose or too little mix	Seal with foil and use 2 to 3 tbsp of mix
Fish is raw inside	Fillet too thick	Smoke longer, or finish in a 180°C oven
Fish is dry	Overdone or not brined	Brine first and rest with the lid on

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Smoke alarm goes off	Too much smoke	Open windows, run the extractor, and use less mix
Fish sticks to the rack	Rack not oiled	Oil the rack lightly

SMOKE, HOT PANS AND LEFTOVERS

Smoke, ventilation and fire: hob smoking makes a lot of smoke. Open a window, switch the extractor to full, check that your smoke alarm works, and never leave the pan unattended. Stop at once if flames appear: turn off the heat and keep the lid on to smother them. Do not use a non-stick pan for smoking.

Hot smoking mix and foil: the smoking mix gets extremely hot, and the foil-lined pan and lid stay scorching afterwards. Use oven gloves, lift the lid away from your face, and leave the pan to cool on a heatproof surface before tipping the mix into a metal bin or a sink of cold water outdoors.

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 set up a hob smoker safely.
- ☐ I can brine and dry fish for smoking.
- ☐ I know the safe temperature for smoked fish.
- ☐ I can use tea as a smoking mix.
- ☐ I know why this course doesn't teach cold-smoking.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapter 8 is A Fish Feast: planning a multi-course fish meal.

Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2

Chapter 8 · A Fish Feast

SKILL GOAL

Plan and cook a multi-course fish meal where every dish is ready at the right time.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A feast is a plan, not a pile of recipes. The principle is **cold first, hot last:** the gravlax is cured two days ahead, the stew is made a day early and reheated, the dessert is set the night before, and only the whole fish is cooked at the last minute. Choose courses that differ in texture and temperature, so a cold starter is followed by a hot main and a cool, light sweet to finish.

This chapter brings together the whole course: Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2, chapters 1 to 7. For the earlier course see Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 1, chapter 8. A feast for four or six is easy; for eight you scale the stew and the starter, not the whole fish, which you simply multiply. The last recipe is your own skills table and signature menu.

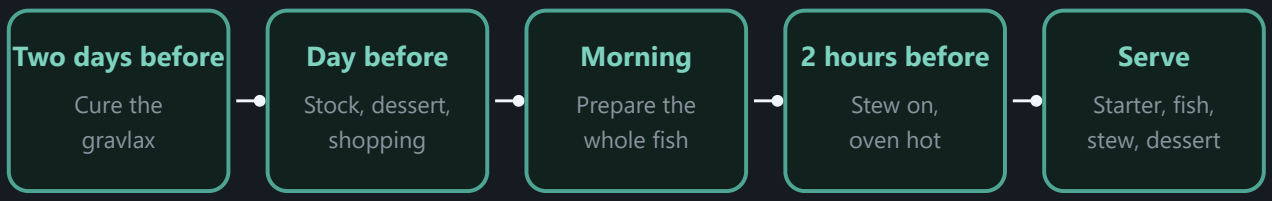


Figure 8. A feast is planned backwards from the moment you sit down.

The method

- **Choose a cold starter, a hot main and a light sweet course,** so the oven is only busy once.
- **Write the timeline backwards** from serving time, starting with anything that cures or sets.

- **Make the stew or curry the day before,** because it improves, and reheat gently until steaming.
- **Cook the whole fish last,** test it, and rest it while you serve the starter.
- **Keep cold food cold and hot food hot,** and wash up as you go.

COURSE	DISH	MADE	FROM CHAPTER
Starter	Crab on toast with gravlax	Gravlax 2 days ahead	5 and 6
Fish main	Roast sea bream	Last minute	1
Stew or curry	Fish stew or prawn curry	The day before	3 and 4
Sweet	Lemon posset	The night before	This chapter

RAW CURED FISH, HOT DISHES AND ALLERGENS

Feast safety: a big meal means many hot pans and a lot of raw fish and shellfish on the same board. Clear and wash up as you go, use separate boards for raw and ready-to-eat foods, keep cold dishes below 5°C until they are served, and don't leave hot dishes out for more than 2 hours.

Cured and pickled fish are not cooked: gravlax and pickled herring are cured, not cooked, so they can carry parasites and bacteria. Use fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days (general guidance) or that the fishmonger says is sushi grade, keep it below 5°C, and eat it within the stated days. These dishes are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system.

Hot pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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

A starter of crab and gravlax

20 minutes (gravlax cured earlier) | 6 portions | assembling a cold starter

Use the gravlax from chapter 6 and the crab mix from chapter 5. Put a spoonful of crab on a toast base, lay a slice of gravlax beside it, and finish with dill and lemon. It is cold, pretty and made ahead, so it frees the oven.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

150 g	gravlax, thinly sliced
200 g	crab mix (white and brown meat, seasoned as in chapter 5)
6	small slices of rye or sourdough
1 tbsp	chopped dill
2 tbsp	crème fraîche
1	lemon, in wedges

1. Toast the bread and cool it. Mix the crème fraîche with the dill and a squeeze of lemon.
2. Pile the crab on each toast and lay slices of gravlax on or beside it.
3. Add a small spoonful of the dill cream, keep chilled below 5°C, and serve within 1 hour.

CURED FISH, CRAB AND ALLERGENS

Cured and pickled fish are not cooked: gravlax and pickled herring are cured, not cooked, so they can carry parasites and bacteria. Use fish that has been frozen at -20°C for at least 7 days (general guidance) or that the fishmonger says is sushi grade, keep it below 5°C, and eat it within the stated days. These dishes are not for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with a weakened immune system.

Crab shell and cooked crab: buy crab that is already cooked and dressed or picked, from a fishmonger you trust, keep it below 5°C and eat it within a day. Crab shell is sharp and cracking it sends splinters, so wear a cloth or gloves and work on a board. Brown meat is rich and strongly flavoured; discard the grey feathery gills and the stomach sac.

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, crustaceans, milk and gluten.

LEVEL 2 · MAIN

A whole fish main

45 minutes | 4 portions | roasting and carving a whole fish for guests

Roast a large bream or bass (1.2 kg) as in chapter 1, with fennel and lemon, and carve at the table: lift the top fillet off in one piece, remove the backbone, and lift the bottom fillet. Warn guests about bones.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	whole sea bream or bass (about 1.2 kg), gutted and scaled
1	fennel bulb, sliced
2	lemons, sliced
6	sprigs thyme
3 tbsp	rapeseed oil
500 g	baby new potatoes, halved

1. Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan, gas 6). Spread the fennel and potatoes on a tray. Slash the fish, season and fill with lemon and thyme, and lay it on top.
2. Roast for **30 to 35 minutes** until the flesh lifts from the bone at the thickest part of the back and the potatoes are golden.
3. Rest for 5 minutes. Lift off the top fillet, lift out the backbone, then serve the bottom fillet with the potatoes and fennel.

HOT OVEN, BONES 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.

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.

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 · POT

A stew or curry course

45 minutes (made the day before) | 6 portions | cooking a shared pot ahead

Choose one of the stews or curries from chapters 3 and 4. For a feast, make the base the day before and chill it, then reheat gently until steaming and add the fish (or prawns) fresh on the day so it stays tender. Serve in small bowls beside the whole fish.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1	batch of tomato stew base (chapter 3) or curry sauce (chapter 4), made the day before
500 g	firm white fish, in large chunks
250 g	raw king prawns
2 tbsp	chopped parsley or coriander
1	lemon, juice

1. Reheat the base gently until steaming hot all the way through, about **10 minutes.**
2. Add the fish and simmer gently for **5 minutes,** then the prawns for 2 to 3 minutes until pink.
3. Finish with lemon and herbs and serve in small bowls.

HOT POT, REHEATING AND ALLERGENS

Hot pot and boiling stew: a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.

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.

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.

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 3 · SWEET

A sweet finish: lemon posset

15 minutes plus 4 hours chilling | 6 portions | setting cream with lemon, no gelatine

Cream, sugar and lemon juice, boiled and cooled, set with no cooking skill needed. It is the best light finish after a rich fish meal. Make it the night before. It contains no alcohol and no raw egg.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

600 ml	double cream
150 g	caster sugar
3	lemons, zest of 1 and juice of 3
150 g	raspberries or other berries
6	shortbread biscuits, to serve

1. Heat the cream and sugar in a pan, stirring until the sugar dissolves, bring to a boil and simmer for **3 minutes.**
2. Take off the heat, stir in the lemon juice and zest, cool for 10 minutes and pour into 6 small glasses.
3. Chill for **at least 4 hours.** Top with berries and serve with shortbread.

> **HOT SUGAR AND CREAM, 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 pot and boiling stew:** a pot of stew or chowder is heavy and stays scalding for a long time. Use a ladle rather than pouring, lift the lid away from your face, keep the handle turned in, and let it cool for a few minutes before serving children.
>
> **Allergens:** contains milk and gluten (shortbread).

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

A timed feast

Planning.

1. Write the timeline for a feast for four, then follow it with a clock and note where it slipped.

Look for: The delays come from the oven and the hob being used at once; spread the work across the previous two days.

EXPERIMENT

Swapping one course

Flexibility.

1. Replace the stew with a curry (or the posset with fruit), changing only that course.

Look for: A feast works when the courses differ in flavour and temperature; swap one at a time to see the effect.

EXPERIMENT

Scaling to eight

Quantities.

1. Plan the same feast for eight, writing down which dishes simply double and which don't.

Look for: The starter and the stew scale easily; two whole fish need two trays or a bigger oven, and the posset needs more glasses.

EXPERIMENT

Your own menu

Making it yours.

1. Write a menu for friends using one dish from each of chapters 1 to 7, and cook it.

Look for: A menu you've planned and cooked once becomes a signature menu. Write down what you'd change.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Crab and gravlax starter				
A whole-fish main				
A stew or curry course				
Lemon posset				
A timed feast				
Swapping one course				
Scaling to eight				
Your own menu				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Everything ready at once	No timeline	Write the plan backwards from serving time
Fish overcooked while waiting	Left in the oven	Take it out when done and rest it

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Cold food warms up	Left out too long	Chill until the moment it's served
Stew too thick when reheated	Evaporated	Add a splash of stock or water
Posset doesn't set	Lemon added too early or not boiled long enough	Simmer for 3 minutes; chill for 4 hours or more
Kitchen chaos	Washing up left until the end	Clear and wash as you go

FEAST LEFTOVERS AND ALLERGENS

Feast safety: a big meal means many hot pans and a lot of raw fish and shellfish on the same board. Clear and wash up as you go, use separate boards for raw and ready-to-eat foods, keep cold dishes below 5°C until they are served, and don't leave hot dishes out for more than 2 hours.

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 plan a feast backwards from serving.
- ☐ I can cure, set and cook ahead.
- ☐ I can carve a whole fish at the table.
- ☐ I can scale a menu up to eight.
- ☐ I have a signature fish menu.

NEXT CHAPTER

Congratulations: you have finished Cooking Skills: Fish and Shellfish 2. A further fish course is not planned; the series continues with the other cooking skills courses.