

Fish

Continued from Page 1G

elastic, and either pink, white or red, depending on the species. Fresh fish gills must be shiny and moist. Scales lie close to the skin, and the skin adheres to the bones.

How long can fresh fish and seafood last in the refrigerator?

By the time fresh fish and seafood gets to a fish shop, it has been out of the water about 48 hours, so you might get another three days in your refrigerator. In the refrigerator, fish must be wrapped and packed in ice (don't let the ice touch the fish or it will "burn" the flesh). Don't let the fish sit in melted ice — a better idea is to cook it the day you buy it. If allowed to loiter in the refrigerator, much of the fish's flavor will be lost, and everything else in your fridge will take on a fishy smell. Don't re-freeze fish after it has been thawed.

What's the best way to buy and store frozen fish?

It's safest to buy vacuum-packed fish marked "deep-frozen product" with a freezing date on it. Deep freezing is much faster than ordinary freezing, which happens slowly. In your freezer, fish should be kept at 4 degrees Fahrenheit to stop microbial activity. But don't keep it frozen too long since it will get "freezer burn," causing the flesh to harden. Once it's thawed,

dip it into water to stop dehydration and oxidation.

Commercial fishermen often use a preservative called tripoly phosphate, which helps seafood absorb liquid. The problem is that its taste offends some people.

"Dry pack" seafood doesn't use it. However, many seafood items, especially bay scallops, rarely come in dry packs. Other seafood has a seawater coating — that's what you are seeing when you look in a display case and see seafood surrounded by chipped ice.

For buying fish, many local chefs recommend Madison's three Seafood Centers, Whole Foods, and Ken Kopps and Brennans. Other supermarkets and stores have good fish and seafood on occasion. No matter where you buy, ask when the shipment came in.

When buying fish, plan for about 7 ounces per person (not including skin and bones). Also, make your decision on how much to buy based on what else is on your menu.

What types of fish are recommended?

Chilean sea bass is considered among the best fish out there. It has been available in the United States for about five years and is one of the best tasting and most popular. Its prices have almost tripled since it first arrived.

Corbena, grouper and snapper from Florida, Fiji and Hawaii are much sought after. Fresh salmon from the Copper River, especially at the beginning of the season, is also popular.

Popular species very often are overfished. Cod off Nova Scotia was fished to point of disappearance. Chilean sea bass is now in trouble. For several years, reputable chefs agreed not to serve swordfish because the population dropped perilously low. Swordfish populations are coming back, so swordfish has been available in the Madison for the last few weeks.

Sharks were similarly overfished. Conscientious diners and buyers keep track of what species are threatened and boycott them until the populations are replenished.

On the flip side, escalar is a delicious fish but has a regrettable Montezuma's revenge effect on about half the people who eat it. Orange roughly sometimes comes from polluted canals. Also, avoid salmon from South America.

What are some tips for preparing fish?

■ To debone fish, use a spring-loaded needle-nose pliers (about \$3 at a hardware store). It takes about minute to pull out the bones. Many fish are



ANDREA ZANI/photo

Throwing kerosene on the fire at the end of a fish boil clears the kettle of fishy-tasting oils that float to the top in cooking.

It wouldn't be Wisconsin without fish fries and boils

So just how did Friday fish fries become so popular in our state?

Wisconsin has a large Roman Catholic population, and old church rules forbade the faithful from eating meat on Fridays. Wisconsin Catholics, especially in the southeastern part of the state, responded by going to restaurants and taverns for fried fish on Fridays.

The church rules against meat on Fridays are gone, except during the period before Easter known as Lent. But thousands of fish fries remain.

Most offer chunks of breaded or batter-fried fish, usually haddock or cod, with cole slaw, rye bread, french fries and, in the German tradition, potato pancakes. Some places also offer higher-priced walleye or perch along with the lower-priced basic fish fry.

The biggest fish fry in the state is at Serb Memorial Hall, on Milwaukee's southwest side, (414) 545-6030.

Fish boils

Fish boils have been part of Door County's fishing culture at least as long as recorded history, and in restaurants since 1959.

In the summer, Lake Michigan whitefish and new potatoes are boiled in kettles of salted water over hardwood fires. At the end, the cook throws kerosene onto the flames, creating a fireball that makes the pot boil over — this last step clears the kettle of fishy-tasting oils that floated to the top in cooking. Then, the fish and potatoes are laid out and eaten with cole slaw, bread and cherry pie.

A famous fish boil in Door County is at White Gull Inn in Fish Creek, (920) 868-3517.

If you want fish for your own fish boil in Door County, try Teskie's Berry Best Foods and Fish, 12266 Highway 42, in Ellison Bay, (920) 854-4443. They sell fresh, smoked and pickled whitefish, and whitefish pate.

— Chris Martell

deboned before they are sold.

■ To make fish look larger on a plate, cut it on the bias to make the surface appear larger.

■ As for the skin, some fish, such as trout and those in the salmon family, have skin that is tasty, so it is a good idea to leave it on. In many cases, skin is left on fish because of laziness.

■ For soups, stews and paella, look for firmer fish that can be cut into chunks. Try North Atlantic whitefish, monkfish, haddock,

shrimp, scallops, clams, mussels. Fish that are prized for their flavor, like tuna and swordfish, are not being used to full advantage in soups or stews.

■ Fish steaks that hold together are best for grilling. Salmon, tuna, swordfish, mahi mahi, marlin, trout, halibut and grouper are well-suited to the grill.

Marinades, even if they are nonfat, help keep the fish from sticking to the grill and drying out. "Dry Rubs" — seasoning that is rubbed on the surface — are good for grilled fish as well. Strong-flavored fish can hold up to stronger flavors, like apple cider, barbecue glazes and fresh herbs.

Spray the grill with nonstick spray. Let the fish cook for about three minutes on one side before turning. If you try to turn it too soon it will fall apart, and the grill marks, which are considered desirable, will be wrecked.

■ Cooking fish in parchment or foil ("en papillote") will keep in moisture and let aromatic ingredients such as wine, lemon, garlic, onion or chervil penetrate the flesh. White-fleshed, delicately flavored fish is good to cook with this method.

Parchment paper, available at places like Williams Sonoma or Vanilla Bean, can be cut open at the table so the scent can waft over the diners. Filets can be wrapped in parchment individually, or the entire fish can be shrouded in it.

Parchment is used instead of foil, in most cases, simply because it is prettier. To use it, put a piece on a cookie sheet, put fish and other ingredients on it, put on a top sheet and roll the edges of the two pieces of paper together.


Use a conventional oven to bake it since a convection oven is apt to burn the paper. Cooking the same way in foil works well in the oven or on a grill.

Remember, the parchment

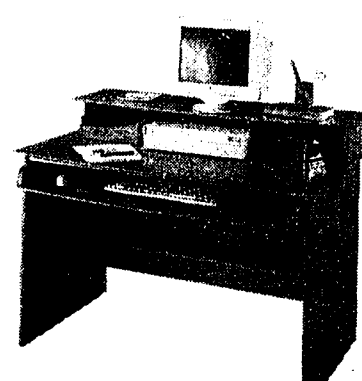
Crossword answers

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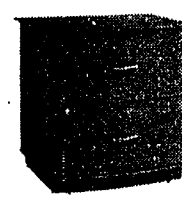
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Not all primroses survive outdoors

Q. I received several potted primroses as a gift. How do I care for them? Can they be planted outside later this year?

A. There are several species of primrose grown as pot plants. However, not all of them are suited to growing outdoors in our Wisconsin climate.

One of the most common, the polyantha primrose (*Primula polyantha*) can be transplanted into your garden in spring. It has small green leaves, so heavily veined that they almost look quilted. The flowers come in many bright or pastel shades of yellow, pink, blue, purple, or white with a yellow eye in the center of the flower.

Indoors, keep the soil evenly moist, but do not overwater. A cool room (temperatures in the low to middle 60s) with an eastern exposure would be ideal. Avoid placing them near heat registers. Wait until the danger of heavy frost has passed before you move them outdoors.

ON GARDENING



DIANE BROWN-RYTLEWSKI MARY FRANCIS HEIMANN

When you plant them outdoors, choose a location that is shaded, with moist soil. Set the plants firmly in place and be sure to mulch around the base of the plants.

Your primroses probably won't bloom again until next year. Polyantha primroses bloom in April through May.

Primroses don't have many insect problems, but they are susceptible to injury from spider mites and slugs.

What's the word on other types of seafood?

Scallops — The biggest type of scallops are sea scallops, which usually cost about \$14 a pound. These are good in butter and cream and some Asian flavors, like ginger and sesame.

Bay scallops are much smaller and are good cooked in sherry and can be cooked with much stronger flavors. The best are harvested in very cold waters, and some of the best in the world are from Chile. Use a heavy bottom pan to cook them.

Chefs say there should be a slight translucence when scallops are cooked, with a warm exterior. You might need to cut one open to check. For instance, a deep-fried scallop might have a crisp brown, caramelized exterior and still be undercooked inside.

Scallops are 100 percent protein and you wouldn't want to add breading. When cooking, no oil will be absorbed. When overcooked scallops taste like a pencil eraser. Boiling scallops doesn't add flavor, so they are best sauteed.

Shrimp — Buy shrimp with the shell on. Shrimp purchased after it has been peeled and deveined will be less flavorful. Although it is tradition to devein shrimp, it is for aesthetic rather than sanitary reasons. Eating shrimp that hasn't been deveined won't hurt you.

Each shrimp has "veins" (a euphemism for intestines) on the back and front. To devein, take a sharp knife and make an incision along the spine, then gently push out the vein. When you peel the shrimp, leave the tail on so the shrimp stays intact.

There are two colors of shrimp, white and yellow, both of which turn pink after cooking. Almost all shrimp available in the Midwest is frozen, but you can't generally tell the difference between good quality frozen and fresh shrimp.

If you are wondering about the "Fabian" trucks that are seen parked around Madison selling fresh shrimp from the back: They are from Galveston, Texas, and have driven straight through with their haul.

An easy way to cook shrimp is sauteed in sherry, which will caramelize its exterior and give it a smoky flavor and beautiful glaze. Saute on high heat with clarified butter or ghee.

Oysters — Shucking an oyster, which should come to your kitchen alive, is one of the most dangerous things you can do in the kitchen. Take an oyster shucker, find a crack near the hinge and pry it open without impaling the palm of your other hand; then detach the oyster from the shell but let it stay, detached, in the shell (unless they are being served out of the shell). Plunge, twist, pop.

Oysters should be eaten raw to best preserve its briny flavor. It's considered an aphrodisiac, and recent research hints that the mollusk's zinc content, may, in fact, make it nature's Viagra. They also are used in stews, Rockefeller-style, with pasta and, mignonnettes, relishes and sauces.

Buy oysters only if they are closed. If they are open in the store, they are already dead and shouldn't be used. They should smell like the ocean, with a melon, flowery touch. Of all the seafood, oysters present the greatest risk of contamination.

Squid and octopus — In the Midwest, these are almost always frozen. Squid's ink pouches are cut out and sometimes in use to color pasta or pasta sauces. You get the tubes and tentacles. Squid is the most fished species in the United States, but almost all of it is exported to Asia.

Squid is usually breaded and deep fried as calamari rings, and it is used in many stir fries. Octopus is often steamed and some people like it Greek style, with nothing but a shot of ouzo.

Sources: Pat Ludeman, Dane County University Extension family living educator; Susan Nitzke, Ph.D., Nutrition Science, UW-Madison; Scott Kennedy, The Seafood Center; Eric Rupert, The Opera House.