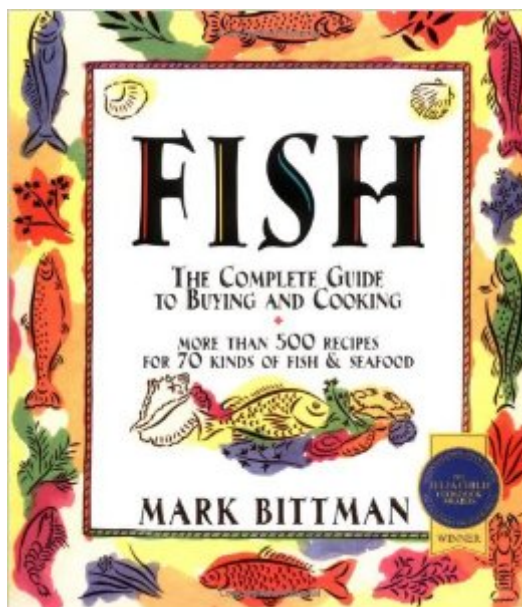


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Fish: The Complete Guide To Buying And Cooking



Synopsis

Fish: The Complete Guide to Buying and Cooking is a book that simplifies, once and for all, the process of preparing fish. Organized in an easy-reference, A-Z format, Fish gives you the culinary lowdown on seventy kinds of fish and shellfish commonly found in American supermarkets and fish stores. Each entry describes how the fish is sold (fillets, steaks, whole, salted), other names it goes by, how the fish should look, and buying tips. Fish begins with general guidelines on how to store, prepare, and cook fish, whether sauteing, frying, grilling, or smoking, and you will find easy-to-follow illustrations of such important basics as how to gut and fillet a fish. Fish also includes up-to-the-minute information on the health benefits of fish in our diet. In addition, there are more than five hundred recipes and variations, all of which use low-fat, high-flavor ingredients to accent the intrinsic natures of the individual fish rather than mask them. And the vast majority of the recipes are ready in less than thirty minutes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Of all the single topics on which cookbooks have been written, it seems to me that fish is the most common. It is certainly true if you look at my library, where there are seven (7) volumes devoted to fish in general, fish of a particular region, or even one family of fish such as the salmon or oysters. Not only is it a popular subject, but it is a popular subject for prominent male cookbook authors. In my library alone, there are volumes by James Beard, James Peterson, Alan Davidson, and the current volume by Mark Bittman. All of these authors are simply dripping with awards for cookbook writing. There are at least two different approaches one can take to a single subject cookbook.

James Peterson in his books on Fish, Sauces, and Vegetables tends to take a deep look, with more details about a fewer number of recipes. Mark Bittman, in this book, tends to take exactly the opposite approach. His main selling point is that he is giving us 'more than 500 recipes for 70 kinds of fish and seafood'. Fitting this approach, the book is laid out very much like an encyclopedia, with all articles on fish labeled by their common names, placed in alphabetical order. Each article begins with a taxonomic section giving both common and scientific names, common commercial forms, general description, substitutions, and reference to buying tips. The scientific name may not be very informative, as a common name such as shrimp may be applied to not only multiple species, but also multiple genera covering thousands of species. The general description is also a mixed bag in that it may be anything from physical description to geographical distribution to economic importance. The most important item in this header is the 'For other recipes see:' entry. This is where you see that a recipe that is good for conch, mussels, or oysters may also be good for clams. I get some sense that the author could have exercised some restraint here. As an example, consider that while squid and shrimp share the property of being done best by cooking very quickly, I may be reluctant to apply a long cooking squid recipe, the kind Mario Batali describes as giving a 'bottom of the sea' flavor to any kind of shrimp. The essay introducing each named fish can vary from three pages for 'shrimp' down to three lines for 'tilapia'. The longer essays are very informative and, as far as I can see, very accurate. I can also add that they can express very strong opinions about some fish. The very short entry for tilapia dismisses the flesh of the fish as having an undesirable, murky flavor. The author gives no recipes for this poor fish and simply leaves us to consult the recipes for porgy and sea bass. The number of recipes per fish is roughly proportional to the economic desirability and availability of the fish. Shrimp, for example, gets twenty recipes including three different versions of curried shrimp. Other classic recipes such as crab cakes also get more than one treatment. Oddly enough, the best-known American shrimp dish, the shrimp cocktail, is not here. Not that I really miss it. The twenty recipes do seem to cover the world, with a just about right distribution of recipes from America, the Mediterranean, and the Pacific Rim. Most recipes are concise without being overly sparse. The list of ingredients is better than many. For example, it goes to the trouble of specifying a 'dry' white wine for a sauce and it is precise enough to say '1/2 cup minced parsley' rather than the less precise 'handful of parsley, minced'. The procedure is clear and I have yet to find any mistakes (I cannot say the same for the equally distinguished James Peterson's procedures). I prefer recipes written with numbered steps, with each step beginning on a new line, but I prefer good recipes to bad even more, and most of these recipes seem to be better than average. As many, if not most of the recipes in this book are ethnic

classics and not the invention of the author, the chance is good that they will appeal to those who are disposed to like the ingredients. If you don't like coconut, don't fault the author for giving recipes using coconut. Since there are so many different recipes from so many different culinary traditions, the chances that you will find something interesting to do with your lovely swordfish steak will be very high. As a food editor for 'The New York Times', Bittman has greater access to current and historical information about fish dishes than most, so the depth and reliability of the information herein is very high. This book is by no means a complete book of fish cookery. There are some entries for escabeche and sevice, but not a word about sushi or sashimi. Of all the books I mentioned on Fish Cookery, I may prefer James Beard for the last word on recipes from America or Alan Davidson for recipes from the Mediterranean, but Bittman has given us a book which gives a broad coverage to recipes from around the world. He succeeds admirably in achieving his goal 'to teach you how to buy good, commonly available fish, and cook it quickly in a variety of basic and delicious ways. Highly recommended. A better general reference for the average cook than other books in a crowded field.

After 30-odd years of avoiding fish, I was finally coerced by my wife a year or so ago to try fish when she would order it at restaurants. I discovered that (a) my tastes have changed since I was 7 and (b) fish can be really good. Having avoided fish for so many years, though, I never learned to cook it. My first attempt was an orange roughly preparation the fishmonger recommended. It had to be the worst meal I have ever made (and I consider myself a fairly good cook)--my wife thought that I was never going to eat fish again! I decided that, if I was going to try fish again at home, I was going to learn how to cook it the right way. After researching .com, I came up with Mark Bittman's Fish as my first "textbook." What a great choice! The first section is very helpful by going into great detail regarding purchasing, preparing and cooking fish. There is a description of each cooking method, how to do it and when (and on which fish) to use each method. The "Basics and Staples" chapter has some good recipes for sauces, stocks, etc. (I just made the "Spicy pepper sauce for fried fish" tonight and used it on a broiled monkfish--FANTASTIC!). What really differentiates this book from others I have paged through is how he organizes the book with each fish having a chapter, a short description and recipes for that particular fish within the chapter and a cross reference for recipes associated with other fish that could be used with this fish. Mark imparts a wealth of knowledge for each fish in this book, and I appreciate his candor. Most recipes are simple and can be prepared quickly. My only complaint, and a minor one at that, is that the book is 8 years old and some of the information (e.g. what fish is popular, fish prices, etc.) is a little dated. This in no way detracts from

my love of this book. In fact, I've opened this book more often in the past few months than any other cookbook I own. I'm no longer afraid of fish--buy this cookbook if you are intimidated by cooking fish as I was.

A plethora of useful info on the subject, well written. It begins with what all of chefs speak strongly on the subject, the ability to purchase fish with confidence. I especially enjoy his admittance that he too as many of us approach our fishmonger with the question, "what's fresh today?" to be answered, "everything!" He provides great insights and helps to aid in discussion with our fishmonger or even some tips on packaged fish. Further, he gives what I think is the best advice on how to store and freeze fish. The recipes come with the caveat that there will be no "marinated shrimp wrapped in ham over a red-peppercorn passion-fruit sauce, etc." recipes. These recipes are just plain designed to bring the best out in the individual fish/seafood being served. One must not think that it's just a question of bake, saute, fry. Here one will find technique and accompaniments targeted for each fish/seafood. One can easily experience after trying several that this guy has did his homework, combining elements which allow the fish at hand to truly shine forth with all its flavor. For example, one fish that my monger seems to have fresh in abundance, Porgy, Bittman offers in a chowder like version, "Cotriade: Fish and Potato Stew," combining bacon, onion and thyme in a great combo. Consider also what he does with Sea Bass, "Crispy Sea Bass with Garlic-Ginger Sauce." This is a knockout dish, expertly offered crispy in shallow bath of vegetable oil, covered with sauce flavored marvelously with ginger to make the bass sing! His shellfish recipes are just as delicious and rightly paired. Outstanding also is buying tips on each species in addition to possible fish substitutes for most recipes. The only drawback for us in the Great Lakes is an absence of the great fish we have here, especially the Lake Whitefish, although there are recipes here which will work.

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