

# HOW TO Cook Alaska Fish

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# HOW TO COOK ALASKA FISH

We often think of cooking as a way to tenderize food. However, fish are tender *before* they are cooked and a brief cooking time will best preserve the natural qualities of fish. Just enough cooking to enable the flesh to be flaked easily from the bones will leave the fish moist and tender and bring out its delicate flavor.

Always test fish for doneness in the thickest part, which naturally takes the longest time to cook. Don't gouge — but poke gently with a fork. If the first fish you test this way is full of marks, it will still taste much better than if you had overcooked it.

A visual method of testing doneness is to check the translucent quality of the fish. When done, it changes to an opaque or clouded color but retains its moist appearance. The moment the fish looks dry or starts to shrink, it's overdone. Fish continues to cook after it is removed from the heat source, so sauces should be prepared in advance and the fish served the moment it is done.

In addition to the considering the length of time for cooking, you will want to choose a method of cooking appropriate for the type of fish. Alaska waters provide us with many delicious fish, including both fatty fish like salmon and lean fish like cod and halibut. Fatty fish, which have fat throughout the tissues of the fish, require less oil or fat added in cooking. Lean fish, which store fat in the fish liver, will be more subject to drying. You may want to choose a method of cooking that provides more fat or provides some moisture for lean fish.

Fish recipes will work just as well with any fish with a similar fat content. A recipe that calls for a specific fatty fish will give the same delicious results no matter which fatty fish is used. If you use a fatty fish recipe for a lean fish, you must be more liberal with the butter, bacon or oil. If using a lean fish recipe for a fatty fish, be less liberal with the fats you add.

## Nutrition

**Calories**—Fish is basically low in calories. Calories are added with breadings, batters, sauces and high fat methods of cooking.

**Protein**—Fish has high quality protein that is easily digestible. The protein is readily broken down and easily absorbed by the body.

**Fat**—Most fish are low in total fat and contain beneficial polyunsaturated fats commonly known as omega-3 fatty acids.

Scientists are currently studying the effects of two omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA, on mental health, brain development, cardiovascular disease and the immune system. These fatty acids have been found to help prevent cardiovascular disease and lower the risk of death from heart attacks by reducing blood clotting, preventing irregular heart beat and lowering blood triglycerides. It is recommended that individuals consume at least two meals per week of fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, eulachon, herring or sardines.

## Purchasing Tips

When purchasing fresh or thawed fish from the seafood counter, let your eyes and nose be the judge. Good quality fish smells sea-fresh. It should not have a strong odor or smell "fishy." Whole fish should have clean, bright, bulging eyes, and gills should be bright red. Fish fillets and steaks should appear moist, firm and freshly cut. Prepackaged fish should contain only a minimum of liquid.

When purchasing frozen fish, look for solidly frozen packages. Do not buy fish that is stored above the chill line of the case. Do not buy seafood with freezer burn or icy white discoloration.

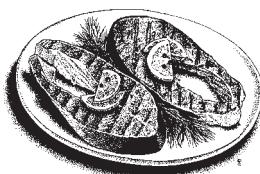
## Storage Tips

Fish is highly perishable. Store fresh or defrosted fish in the coldest part of your refrigerator and plan to use it within two to three days of purchase. Wrap fish in moisture/vapor-proof packaging designed for the freezer. Lean fish may be stored up to six months in a home freezer at 0°F or lower. For best quality, high-fat fish may be stored up to four months in a home freezer at 0°F or lower.

## Thawing Tips

Do not allow frozen fish to thaw until you are ready to use it. Refreezing fish will severely alter its quality.

It's best to thaw fish overnight in the refrigerator. Place the wrapped package on a plate or shallow pan to catch any liquid that drips out. Allow 8-10 hours (extremely large cuts may take a bit longer). Do not try to speed up the process of thawing fish by placing it in warm water. Flavor and texture are both lost this way. Never allow seafood to thaw at room temperature.



# BASIC COOKERY METHODS

## Baking Fillets or Steaks

Oven cooking for fillets and steaks simplifies preparation and cleanup. Bake as follows:

1. Sprinkle both sides of the fish with salt and pepper. Place the fish in a well-oiled baking dish or line a baking pan with aluminum foil to avoid breaking the cooked fish. Oil foil very lightly.
2. Brush the fish generously with butter or margarine seasoned with a little lemon juice and grated onion to taste.
3. Bake in a moderate oven, 350°F, about 20–25 minutes or until the fish flakes when tested with a fork. Fish may also be baked at 400°F for a shorter length of time.

### Klondike Pecan Salmon Bake

2 tablespoons Dijon-style mustard  
2 tablespoons butter, melted  
1 tablespoon honey  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup fresh bread crumbs  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup finely chopped pecans or walnuts  
2 teaspoons chopped parsley  
4 (6-ounce) salmon fillets or steaks, thawed

Heat oven to 400°F. Blend mustard, butter and honey in small bowl; set aside. Mix breadcrumbs, pecans and parsley in another small bowl; set aside. Season salmon fillets/steaks with salt and pepper. Place on nonstick or spray-coated baking sheet or broiler pan. Brush salmon with mustard-honey mixture. Pat breadcrumb mixture onto top surface of salmon. Bake uncovered for 10 minutes per inch of thickness, measured at thickest part, or until salmon flakes easily when tested with a fork.

Makes 4 servings.

## Baking Whole Fish

1. Baking is an excellent way to cook fish weighing 2½ pounds or more. It is important to know the exact cooking weight because this determines oven time. Fish take much less time to bake than meat or poultry.
2. If possible, bake fish with the head on in order to seal in flavor and juices.
3. Rub fish cavity with salt.
4. Line baking pan with aluminum foil to facilitate transfer of fish to serving platter and to lessen cleaning chores. Less oil is needed when foil is used.
5. Place fish on oiled foil or in a well-oiled pan.
6. Brush fish with melted butter, margarine or salad oil. If preferred, lay three or four strips of bacon over the fish. If stuffing is used, allow about 1 cup per pound of fish. Stuff the salted cavity loosely; close the opening with skewers and lace with kitchen string.
7. Bake in moderate 350°F oven 12–15 minutes per pound, or until the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. (Fish can also be baked at 400°F for a shorter length of time, approximately 8–12 minutes per pound.)
8. Timing may also be determined by thickness instead of pounds. In a 350°F oven, bake whole fresh fish for 10 minutes for every inch of thickness as measured at the thickest part. Allow 20 minutes per inch of thickness for unthawed fish.

## Broiling

1. The broiler rack is not needed when broiling fish. Oil only the area of the broiler pan that will be covered by the fish. (Lining the pan with heavy aluminum foil makes the pan easier to clean and can also make it easier to transfer the fish to a platter after cooking.)
2. Steaks or fillets should be ¾ to 1 inch thick. Thinner ones tend to be dry when broiled.
3. Brush fish generously with melted butter, margarine, salad oil, French dressing marinade or other sauce. (If desired, lemon juice and a little dill weed can be added to butter, margarine or oil.)
4. Sprinkle fish on both sides with salt and pepper.
5. Arrange fish on the broiler pan. Place fillets skin side down.
6. Place broiler pan in the oven so that the tops of fillets or steaks are about 3–4 inches from the heat unit. Increase the distance slightly for thicker fish.
7. Broil 8–12 minutes. Fillets or steaks may be turned after 3–5 minutes, but this is not necessary. Cook only until the fish flakes easily with a fork.

## Tanana Valley Salmon

- 4 (6-ounce) salmon fillets or steaks, thawed
- 1 lime
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon coarse ground black pepper

Cover bottom of broiler pan with aluminum foil and lightly oil. Place salmon fillets/steaks on foil.

Cut lime in half and squeeze juice over salmon fillets/steaks. Blend cumin, chili powder, salt, black pepper and cinnamon in a small bowl; sprinkle over salmon. Broil salmon about 4 inches from heat for 10 minutes or until salmon flakes easily when tested with a fork.

Makes 4 servings

## Deep Fat Frying

1. Use a heavy, deep saucepan, a fry basket and a deep-fat frying thermometer, or an electric fryer with an automatic temperature control.
2. Use enough oil to float the fish. Preheat oil to 350°F.
3. Fish may be coated with breading or dipped in batter.
4. Fry one layer of fish at a time. Allow enough room so that pieces do not touch.
5. Cook until the fish are golden brown and flake easily. Usually 3–5 minutes.

## Charcoal Grilling

1. Thicker cuts of fish are preferable as they tend to dry out less during cooking.
2. Brush fish with melted butter, margarine, oil or barbecue sauce. Salt and pepper fish.
3. Place fish on rack that is oiled or sprayed with nonstick cooking spray, about 4 inches from moderately hot coals.
4. Grill 10–20 minutes, depending on thickness of fish.
5. Brush occasionally with oil or sauce during cooking period.
6. Fish may also be placed on oiled foil, sealed into packets and grilled.

## Lemon Dill Salmon

**4 sheets (12×18-inch) heavy duty aluminum foil  
4 (4- to 6-ounce) salmon fillets/steaks, thawed  
4 medium carrots, diagonally sliced  
1 each zucchini and yellow squash, thinly sliced  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup margarine/butter, melted  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup fresh lemon juice  
2 teaspoons dried dill weed  
1 teaspoon lemon pepper**

Preheat oven to 450°F or preheat grill to medium-high. Spray foil with nonstick cooking spray. Center salmon fillet/steak on each sheet of foil. Arrange carrot slices around salmon. Top with squash slices. Combine remaining ingredients; spoon over salmon and vegetables. Bring up sides of foil and double fold. Double fold ends to form a packet, leaving room for heat circulation inside packet. Repeat to make four packets. Bake 17–20 minutes on a cookie sheet, 9–11 minutes in covered grill.

Makes 4 servings.

## Microwave Baking

1. Place fillets or steaks in microwave-safe baking dish that has a light coating of oil or a nonstick cooking spray. Turn under thin ends.
2. Cover dish with plastic wrap vented at one corner or use vented microwave lid.
3. Microwave on HIGH (100 percent power) for 4 minutes. Remove from oven and let stand 2 minutes. Check fish for doneness. Microwave for another 1–2 minutes if necessary.

## Honey Mustard Glazed Salmon Steaks

2 (4- to 6-ounce) salmon steaks, thawed

1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard

2 teaspoons honey

pinch of thyme

Place salmon steaks in microwave-safe dish. In a separate bowl, mix together remaining ingredients. Drizzle mustard glaze evenly over salmon steaks. Microwave on HIGH (100 percent) for 4 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to stand for 2 minutes. Check fish for doneness. Microwave for another 1–2 minutes if necessary.

Makes 2 servings.

## Oven Frying

Baking at a high temperature gives the crisp crust and browned flavor of panfried fish yet uses less fat, takes much less attention and causes fewer cooking odors. Prepare as follows:

1. Dip the fillets or steaks into milk that has been heavily salted (1 teaspoon salt to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk.) Roll fish in crumb mixture made as follows: Combine:

**1 cup fine bread, cracker or cereal crumbs**

**$\frac{1}{4}$  cup paprika**

**$\frac{1}{4}$  cup melted butter or margarine**

This mixture will bread about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds of fish. (If desired,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup shredded cheddar cheese can be added to crumbs.)

2. Arrange the crumbed fillets or steaks, side by side, in a well-oiled baking dish.
3. Bake the fish in a very hot oven, 500°F, for 8–10 minutes or until the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.

## Pan Frying

1. Fish may be breaded or not, as you choose.
2. Heat about  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch oil in the bottom of heavy frying pan. For pans with a temperature control, the right heat is 350°F.

3. Place one layer of fish in the hot oil, taking care not to overload the pan and thus cool the oil.
4. Brown on one side; turn and brown the other side.
5. Cooking time will vary with thickness of fish, usually about 8–10 minutes will do it.

## Lemon Garlic Salmon

**2 tablespoons butter or olive oil  
2 teaspoons minced garlic  
1 teaspoon lemon pepper  
2 (4- to 6-ounce) salmon fillets/steaks, thawed  
lemon wedges**

Melt butter in large skillet over medium-high heat. Stir in garlic. Season salmon fillets/steaks on both sides with lemon pepper. Place fillets/steaks in pan and cook 10 minutes per inch of thickness, measured at thickest part, or until fish flakes when tested with a fork. Flip fillets/steaks half-way through cooking to brown on both sides. Sprinkle with lemon juice before serving.

Makes 2 servings.

## Poaching

Poaching fish is so simple that it lends itself to family meals. Any fish can be poached. The poaching liquid may be milk, salted water, acidulated water,\* court bouillon\*\* or soup. Plan to serve the fish with a sauce made from the liquid (or part of it) in which the fish was poached.

The only part of the poaching technique that may be difficult is handling the fish without breaking it. Large fish should be wrapped in cheesecloth; small ones can be poached in a skillet and removed with a pancake turner. Lean fish is easier to poach than fat fish, as it does not fall apart so easily.

\*acidulated water ( $\frac{1}{2}$  cup lemon juice and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons salt, per quart water)

\*\*court bouillon for fish (yield: 1 gallon)

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 gallon water                     | 2 tablespoons salt                          |
| 1 cup white vinegar or lemon juice | $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon peppercorns, crushed |
| 1 cup onions, sliced               | 1 bay leaf                                  |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup celery, sliced   | $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon thyme                |
| $\frac{1}{2}$ cup carrots, sliced  | 10–12 parsley stems                         |

*Combine all ingredients in a large pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 30 minutes. Strain and cool.*

## **Skillet Method of Poaching Fish**

1. Heat poaching liquid in deep skillet, using just enough liquid to cover fish.
2. Place the fish in the liquid and adjust the heat so the liquid is just simmering.
3. Cover the skillet and simmer until the fish flakes easily with a fork, about 5–10 minutes, depending on thickness of fish.
4. Remove fish carefully to a hot platter.
5. The poaching liquid can be the base for a sauce to serve with the fish. A simple way to make a variety of sauces is to combine the poaching liquid with undiluted canned or frozen soup.

### **Pan Poached Salmon Piccata**

**½ cup water**  
**2 teaspoons lemon juice**  
**¼ teaspoon chicken broth granules**  
**2 (4- to 6-ounce) salmon fillets/steaks, thawed**  
**1 tablespoon butter**  
**1 tablespoon capers**  
**black pepper, to taste**

Bring water and lemon juice to a boil in medium-sized skillet. Stir in chicken granules. Reduce heat to a simmer and place salmon fillets/steaks in pan. Cover and simmer over low heat, 10 minutes per inch of thickness, measured at thickest part, or until fish flakes when tested with a fork. Remove salmon from pan; keep warm. Boil remaining liquid in pan until it reduces to approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup. Whisk in butter and stir in capers. Spoon sauce over fish. Serve on a bed of cooked noodles, if desired.

Makes 2 servings.

## **Steaming**

Steaming is a method of cooking fish by means of the steam generated from boiling water. When cooked over moisture in a tightly covered pan, the fish retain their natural juices and flavors.

A steam cooker is ideal, but any deep pan with a tight cover is satisfactory. If a steaming rack is not available, anything may be used that prevents the fish from touching the water. The water used for steaming may be plain, or seasoned with various spices, herbs or wine. When the water boils rapidly, the

fish are placed on the rack, the pan is covered tightly and the fish are steamed for 4–10 minutes or until they flake easily when tested with a fork. Steamed fish may be served in the same manner as poached fish.

**Recipes courtesy of  
Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute  
[www.alaskaSeafood.org](http://www.alaskaSeafood.org)**

*Recipes tested by members of the Alaska Association  
for Family and Community Education.*

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