



Sally's Galley

By Sally Oulton

How to Cook Fish (or other seafood) (and not over do it !)

As I said last month, there is nothing better than catching your own fish. Fresh fish is delicious and if cooked the right way, it should be sensational. The most common mistake people make is overcooking seafood.

Have you ever been to a restaurant and ordered a dish that sounded so wonderful on the menu but was only to be bitterly disappointed to find it was overcooked or overpowered with too many flavours?

Seafood is easy to overcook as it generally cooks very quickly, especially compared to other meats. It is delicate in structure and flavour and should be cooked with care. Regardless of this, believe it or not, it is simple to cook, once you know how and learn how best to enhance it, so you can enjoy its unique flavour. With a piece of fresh fish, a lemon and a bottle of olive oil, you can whip up dinner in ten minutes and it will be scrumptious.

Okay, so how do we cook it?

There are many ways such as baking, grilling, poaching, steaming, smoking, deep-frying and curing. Whatever method is chosen if you're reading from a recipe, use the suggested cooking times only as a guide because seafood continues to cook even after it is removed from its heat source. Ideally, remove your dish before the completion of its required cooking time.

In this article I will only have room to mention how to grill and sauté. The easiest and quickest ways to cook fish and are the most common ways we like to cook fish here in

Australia.

It isn't realistic to try and follow a difficult recipe while on board or on the beach, or out in the bush. You don't need complicated recipes to enjoy seafood. With only a single burner stove, a barbeque or a campfire, it needs to be kept simple. With years of cooking while underway sailing across the Atlantic or throughout the Mediterranean, I've certainly learnt some quick, easy, simple recipes which I've put to good use, especially after we've caught one straight off the back of the boat.

It's important you know which fish

fire. It adds a light, smoky flavour to seafood and sears the food giving it a crispy, savoury outer crust. Therefore, it is important that you select the appropriate seafood. Firm fillets such as tuna, marlin, salmon, barramundi, mahi-mahi, red mullet and other fish high in fat and oils are particularly good for barbequing or grilling because they hold together well and don't stick.

Make sure the grill rack is clean and very hot before you start to grill. The key to keeping it from sticking to the grill rack is to rub it quickly with a paper towel dipped in a little oil



to cook for which methods. Not every method is suitable for every fish. As a very general guide, species that have high moisture or oil content are best suited to grilling while species that are low in moisture or oil are better suited to frying.

Barbequing or char-grilling on an open grill is a dry-heat method of cooking at a high temperature and is the only cooking method that we still use regularly that cooks with a live

before you put the seafood on the grill and handle the seafood gently when cooking so it doesn't fall apart.

Before you grill your fish, you will need to coat it to keep it moist. For example, brush with a little olive oil or marinate for an hour or longer. I do this on a boat or camping by using a Ziploc bag and put it in the esky or fridge. Include some chopped herbs in your oil or some sliced chilli, and season your fish



Above: Taste the Caribbean influence - barbecued fillets are still one of my favourites, and always popular with the crew. **Left:** Garlic prawns anyone? The secret is to protect the prawn's delicate flavour.

immediately before you begin cooking, otherwise it could start to 'cook' the flesh. Avoid salt, as it tends to draw out the moisture.

Very thick chunks of tuna, swordfish or salmon are sealed at high heat and served rare or medium, like a steak.

For tuna steaks, I marinate in a little soy sauce, honey and sesame seeds and serve with a delicious fresh mango salsa. You can do this on your boat or by your campfire. Simply dice a mango, a small red onion and a tomato, squeeze some lime and a bunch of chopped coriander. I barbeque my 2-3cm thick steaks for a minute and half each side so it is still pink in the middle but warm.

If barbequing delicate finfish, marinate in lemon or lime juice to firm the flesh and cover the grating with foil that has been perforated. If using an overhead griller, line its tray with foil and place the pan 45-50mm from the heat.

If you want to grill whole fish, try finfish such as snapper, emperor, nannygai or barramundi. Score the skin to help with more even cooking but be careful not to score too deeply or it will dry out the flesh. Use a grill basket to make it easier to handle.

(See cooking times in the chart on the next page, P-74.)

Prawns, Morton Bay bugs and rocklobster are particularly wonderful grilled. Pre-cooked crustaceans are red in colour and are not suitable for cooking. Ask your fishmonger for green ones.

With prawns, sprinkle with salt and grill them in their shells until the shells turn pink, for about 5 minutes. Serve piping hot. If you decide to shell them, marinate them in olive oil and lots of freshly chopped garlic, and season. Cook under the grill for 10 minutes and then quickly toss them in a hot wok or pan to finish them off. Sprinkle with parsley.

If you find green Morton Bay bugs, you are in for a treat, because they taste out of this world. There are two ways to cook them on the barbeque. Either cut them in half and char-grill or take the bug out of the shell and marinate in olive oil, garlic and herbs before grilling.

Scallops are also wonderful for



Editor's Note: 36 yr old Sally Oulton was born in Perth, did a stint in NZ for five years, before settling in Dubbo, NSW where she grew up with her family. Leaving Oz in 1994, she travelled to Europe, did the secretarial thing for three years - and then changed course to study cooking in 1997. After her first cooking assignment (in the '97 Admiral's Cup) she spent the next ten years at sea - all over the world - in an extraordinary career that has so far embraced 60,000 miles at sea in everything from crack ocean racing yachts in Europe and South America, 'white yachts' in the Med, Caribbean and the Whitsundays - to Oz game boats off the Ribbons. Now back home, with her partner and a 19' Haines, they plan to explore the GBR via trailerboat.

Seafood	Approximate cooking times for grilling or barbecuing	Seafood	Approximate cooking times for pan-frying
Whole finfish 400-600g	12-15 minutes	Whole finfish 300-500g	12-15 minutes
Finfish fillet 3cm thick 2cm thick 1cm thick	9 minutes 6 minutes 5 minutes	Finfish fillet 3cm thick 2cm thick 1cm thick	10 minutes 7 minutes 4 minutes
Prawns Medium size	2-4 minutes	Prawns Medium size	2 minutes
Bug or Rocklobster Halved Flesh only	4-10 minutes 2-5 minutes	Scallops	1-2 minutes
Scallops	2-3 minutes	<i>(Guide taken from Australian Seafood Users Manual)</i>	

char grilling, marinated in olive oil and some chopped parsley for a couple of hours. Thread three or four onto skewers (which have been soaking in water for half an hour so they don't burn on the grill) and char grill on a hot barbeque for 2-3 minutes each side.

Saut eing or shallow frying is another excellent and easy way to cook fish and is ideal over the galley stove or a campfire. It is important to have a good frying pan, ideally a non-stick one. Saut eing is not good for fragile fish, as the tossing in the pan will break the fish into pieces. Fish steaks, thick fillets and small thin whole fish are the simplest to saut e because they cook through in about the same amount of time it takes for the exterior to brown. The fish should remain moist and succulent producing a lovely crispy, brown crust.

Cooking fillets such as snapper or emperor, I like to keep the skin on because the skin holds the fillet together, looks great on a plate and I love the crispy skin. Fish skin contracts when hot, so score the skin and cook skin-side down so that the skin blisters and becomes crisp. This will also prevent it from curling. Using



Eating is good - but catching 'em is close behind! Sally in action off Hamilton Island.

chopped parsley or other herbs.

If you don't want to use butter, grapeseed and canola oil are best for shallow frying and less smoky than olive oil when cooking on high heat.

Everybody loves crumbed fish. The secret to achieving a wonderful crispy, crust is to coat the fish with flour, egg (whisked) and then breadcrumbs. For beautiful golden crumbs try cornflake crumbs which you find near the spices in the supermarket. If you're gluten intolerant, try rice crumbs

a non-stick pan will prevent the skin from sticking.

Fillets cooked in butter with a squeeze of lemon and sprinkled with freshly chopped herbs is simply delicious. The trick is to heat the butter quickly, so it is foaming. (Buy good quality butter and be careful not to let it burn. If it starts to smoke and go brown, it is starting to burn). Add the fish and reduce the heat to moderate. Cook for 2-3 minutes each side depending on thickness. Slip onto a plate; pour over some freshly squeezed lemon juice, some juices from the pan and sprinkle with

found in the gluten free food section. These give a lovely crisp, yellow flavour and have become a favourite.

How do you know when it is ready? When fish becomes opaque it is ready and you can test how cooked it is with the tip of a knife.

Golden rules in cooking seafood:

- Handle carefully and keep cutting boards clean
- Keep seafood clean, cool and covered
- Do not overcook, reheat or refreeze
- Prepare only small amounts

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