



# Sally's Galley

By Sally Oulton

## Keeping Your Catch Fresh!

**A**fter more than ten years of cooking for the rich and famous on the sea around the world, catching fish right off the back of the boat is one of my foremost treasured memories. There is nothing better than eating fresh fish. It simply tastes delicious.

With much experience and luck catching fish on the seven seas and back here in Australia, I am going to share with you some tips, ideas and wonderful recipes I have picked up along the way. Some of these recipes will include a few favourites.

In this first column I am going to talk about the most important aspect of what to do after you catch a fish and that is how to maximise the quality of your catch. Also I will list a few simple ideas of what to do with your fish.

We know fish is very good for us and that it nourishes our bodies but once it dies it begins to spoil. If it isn't placed under ideal conditions, your catch will quickly turn bad and become inedible. So it is essential that you know how to keep your fish fresh when you land it and keep it that way before you eat it, either on your boat or at home. It doesn't matter if you own a tinny or a Riviera, you can keep your fish fresh as long as you do the following things:

**1. When** you bring your catch up on board, treat it as gently as you can and kill it as quickly as possible by stunning it with a blow to the head and then bleed it by cutting the gill area.

**2. Before** it has the opportunity to pass through rigor mortis, gut your fish. Make sure you rinse away any remaining guts and clean the whole

fish with a bottle of fresh drinking water. This will prevent possible contamination and maintain its quality. If your fish is left too long in the heat it will begin to bend as rigor mortis sets in, so place it straight under chilled conditions.

**3. Keep it** in the coldest part of the fridge around zero degrees for up to two days. If you don't have a fridge or battery operated ice-box on board, make slurry from ice and a little water. Party Ice purchased at a



**Editor's Note:** 36yr 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 - and a single burner camp stove.

petrol station mixed with a little water will do the job but if you can freeze saltwater in a couple of containers before you go fishing and mix it with a little seawater, this will result in chilling your fish a lot quicker because it has a lower melting temperature. Fish which have been chilled in saltwater ice slurry immediately after capture will last longer than fish that have not been iced.

**4. If you decide** to fillet your fish, don't throw them straight in the icebox or esky without wrapping them up in waterproof plastic bags first. It is important to wrap the fish well to prevent drying out and tainting other foods, and to avoid your catch from being contaminated. Ziploc bags are fantastic for this. Remember in relation to finfish (other than coral reef finfish), you must not remove the skin from a fish on a boat until the fish is brought to shore. If unsure about the rules check the Department of Primary Industries and and/or Fisheries website in your state.

**5. If for some reason** you can't enjoy your fish within a day or two of catching it, it can be frozen for up to three months. Place only two or three fillets in each ziploc bag and spread them out flat so each bag freezes as quickly as possible. Do not pile the fish in a heap. To squeeze all the air out of the bag, place a straw in the corner of an almost sealed Ziploc, suck the air out and quickly seal. If you're out for more than 2 days and your ice slurry is disappearing, I would suggest eat your catch.

**6. If you catch** a fish too big for your icebox, keep it in a hessian sack and pour cold water over often. Keep it in the shade and cover with frozen ice packs to keep it cool.

Despite how clichéd it may sound, coming home to Australia this year

and fishing up and down the Queensland coast has made me realise this country really is a lucky country. We care about what we fish, respect bag limits and are serious about protecting our marine resources. We have hundreds of varieties of edible fish in our waters and unlike in Europe and Asia where much of their fish stocks have been over-fished, we do our bit and put back our catches which are undersize. I have visited markets in both Europe and Asia and was surprised by their eagerness to sell anything that they can find in their oceans without realising the consequences this will have on later generations.

Dining out in restaurants both overseas and in Australia has been a mixture of emotions. Frequently it was a let down because more than often, fish served in a restaurant has been frozen or farmed and tastes nothing compared to what we catch straight off the back of our boats in our pristine waters. Other times it was wonderful sampling the local fish caught that morning and prepared the local way, and you will see some of that influence in the upcoming editions of Sally's Galley. With commercial fishing over-fishing much of our oceans, it is no longer a poor man's meal it once used to be, so it makes it even more special to catch our own.

With the diversity of cultures living here in Australia, there are many ways it has influenced the way we prepare our seafood. Basically, we eat fish raw, marinated, baked, sautéed, battered, crumbed, barbecued, cured, cold-smoked, hot-smoked and pickled.

My fondest catch is of a 50-pound Mahi-Mahi caught off the coast of Brazil. Two days afterwards the crew christened me with the decomposing head, guts and skin which they had left in the engine room to quicken up the decaying process in time for the equator crossing.

All sailors who sail across the equator for the first time pay tribute to King Neptune – the Greek God 'Poseidon' who keeps us safe at sea. It was hilarious but gruesome and despite it taking two days to wash the fish smell out of my hair, the flesh was one of the most succulent and delicious fish I have ever tasted.

Mahi-Mahi or dolphin fish is a tasty, meaty white flesh fish and I cooked it up in a few different ways.

I pan-fried it in butter for the first night's dinner, marinated it in lime and coconut milk to make a Polynesian dish called *ceviche* for lunch the following day, and to finish it off crumbed it in crushed golden cornflake crumbs.

One of the quickest and easiest ways to enjoy fresh white fish fillets is simply pan-fried in Ghee/clarified butter. This butter can be brought to a much higher temperature than normal butter without burning. You can find ghee in the butter section at your local supermarket.

You can pan-fry on a barbecue, over a fire on the beach or on your one/two stove burner on your boat.

### Pan-Fried Fish

Pat the fish dry with paper towels. Dust lightly with flour and season. Heat 50-100g of ghee in the frying pan large enough to fit all your fillets, or use half the butter and cook the

fish in two batches. Don't overcrowd your pan.

Put the fish in the pan, skin-side up or the side where the skin had been and cook for 2-4 minutes (depending on the thickness of the fillet), or until golden. Turn over carefully and cook on the other side for another 4 minutes or until the fish is cooked through. The trick is not to overcook your fish as overcooking spoils the flavour and texture of fish. When it loses its translucent appearance and turns opaque all the way through, it is ready. It should also flake easily when cooked and feel firm.

Lift out on to plates (warm ones are even better) and drizzle with 2 tablespoons of lemon juice and sprinkle with chopped parsley. Pour off any pan juices. Serve with lemon wedges, crisp green salad or some steamed greens and potato wedges. (If barbecuing or campfire, wrap some potatoes in foil and put on coals)

*Bon Appetit!*

**F&B**



*Sally pays homage to King Neptune in the traditional fashion - one hopes it helped keep her safe at sea to justify the ignominy of this hilarious (if nauseous!) sailing ritual bestowed upon those who cross the Equator for the first time.*