

Mariner's Menu

SEAFOOD INFORMATION FROM UNC SEA GRANT

Poached Fish — An Easy Catch

Mar/Apr 1991

Many people think that poaching is a mysterious and difficult way to cook fish. In reality, it is one of the easiest cooking methods. And it certainly produces some of the most delicious fish you'll ever eat.

Simply defined, poaching is cooking in an aromatic broth.

Fish are usually poached in a court bouillon. But you can also use milk or lightly seasoned water. One of the simplest ways I know to cook fish requires no special ingredients and no measuring. Melt about one-third stick of margarine in a long, shallow pan or electric skillet. Sprinkle with garlic powder. Add the amount of water you'll need to cover your fish. Pour in about one cup of dry white wine and add a bay leaf. Bring to a boil.

Place your fillets in the broth and cook until the fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. This will take about eight to ten minutes, or longer for thicker fillets. You will have delicious, delicately flavored fish, with no masking of their true flavor.

I cook whole, dressed fish this way to make fish flakes. Try it as an alternative to the fish flaking instructions in the last *Mariner's Menu*.

Court bouillon usually consists of water, white wine, onions, celery, carrots and parsley, with some thyme and a bay leaf. You can add your favorite ingredients and seasonings. Chop the vegetables to release their flavor. Once you've made the bouillon, you can cook in it more than once.

In poaching, food is completely submerged in the cooking liquid. If

Poached Flounder Fillets with Green Onion and Garlic Butter

6 medium flounder fillets

6 cups water

1 1/2 cups dry white wine

1/2 cup thinly sliced onion

1/4 cup thinly sliced carrots

1/4 cup coarsely chopped celery

1/4 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon dried thyme

1 bay leaf

1 clove garlic, peeled

2 sprigs fresh parsley

Combine ingredients for poaching liquid in large, shallow pan or fish poacher. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes. While liquid is simmering, prepare green onion and garlic butter.

Place fish in liquid, submerging it entirely. Poach until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork, about 10 minutes. Gently remove to serving platter. Serves 6.

Green Onion and Garlic Butter:

1/2 cup margarine, softened

2 tablespoons minced green onion

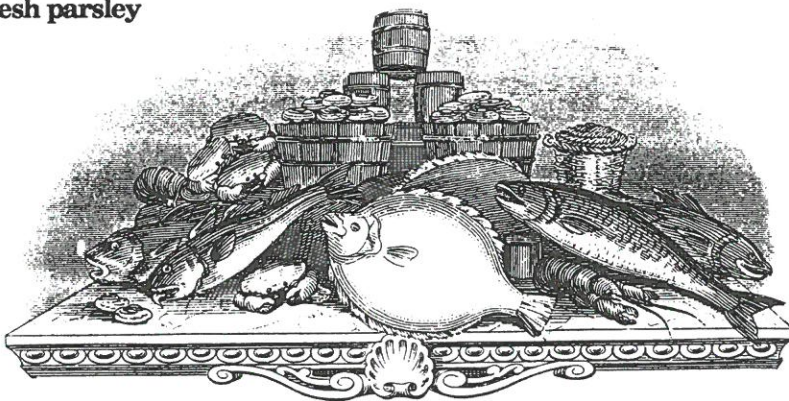
2 cloves garlic, pressed

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

3 tablespoons finely minced, fresh parsley

Place margarine in small bowl. Add onion, garlic, pepper and lemon juice and blend well. Add parsley and blend gently. Spread on hot fish.



Continued on next page

Milk Poached Flounder with Mornay Sauce

4 medium flounder fillets

3 cups milk
1 1/2 cups water
1 large onion, sliced
1 carrot, chopped
1 bay leaf
1/2 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

Mornay Sauce

1 tablespoon margarine
1 tablespoon flour
1/2 cup fish or chicken broth
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup liquid egg substitute
1/2 cup freshly grated Swiss cheese
1/16 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/8 teaspoon salt

Prepare sauce first and set aside. Place ingredients for poaching in large, shallow pan or fish poacher. Bring to boil, add fish and lower heat. Poach until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork, about 10 minutes. Serves 4.

Melt margarine in medium saucepan over medium heat. Blend in flour, stirring with a whisk. Add broth gradually, stirring constantly. Cook until thickened, continuing to stir constantly. Add white pepper.

Blend cream and egg substitute together. Gradually add to thickened sauce. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until thickened. Do not allow to boil.

Add cheese to sauce. Cook over low heat until cheese is melted. Add cayenne pepper. Serve over poached fish.

Poached Flounder Fillets in Cream Sauce

6 medium flounder fillets

2 1/2 cups milk
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
1 large onion, sliced
3 sprigs fresh thyme
1 bay leaf
2 whole cloves
4 sprigs fresh parsley
1/4 teaspoon Tabasco sauce

Cream Sauce

2 tablespoons margarine
3 tablespoons cornstarch
2 cups poaching liquid
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

Place poaching ingredients in large, shallow pan or fish poacher. Bring to boil. Reduce heat. Place fish in liquid and cook until it flakes easily when tested with a fork, about 10 minutes. Remove to serving platter and keep warm.

Melt margarine in medium saucepan over moderate heat. Add cornstarch, stirring with a wire whisk. Gradually add poaching liquid, stirring constantly. Cook until thickened and smooth, stirring constantly. Gradually stir in cream. Add nutmeg. Cook over very low heat for 5 minutes. Pour sauce over warm fish. Serves 6.

your fish is not covered when you put it in, add enough water to cover it.

Fish is delicate and should never be boiled. When you poach, the surface of the water should shiver or shimmer, not simmer. Only the tiniest bubbles should be visible.

As with all cooking methods, poaching time is determined by the thickness of the fish. Remove fish immediately when done to prevent further cooking. Overcooking is the most common problem in seafood cooking. And you can overcook fish and dry it out even when it is cooked in water.

For ease in poaching large fish or large fillets, wrap in a layer of cheesecloth before cooking. For very large fish, double the cloth. Allow several inches of extra cloth on each end. Twist the ends and make knots to use as handles when lifting the fish.

You can poach whole fish, steaks or fillets. The recipes in this bulletin call for fillets. Many people do not like to serve whole fish because it can be difficult to cut through the backbone, and there are bones in the servings. Using fillets eliminates these problems. Always place fillets or steaks in a single layer to poach.

When poaching fillets, many people prefer skinless ones. This prevents curling. However, not much curling occurs in small fillets, so if you do not object to the skin, it's fine to leave it on. Steaks should be poached with the skin on to keep them from coming apart. Remove the skin after poaching.

Remember that you can substitute forms in recipes. Use steaks instead of fillets, fillets instead of whole fish. Just adjust the cooking time.

And always remember that you can substitute species. Often people think that they must have the particular fish named in a recipe. But this is not true. Just substitute like species. For example, use one lean fish in place of another, a mild flavor for another mild flavor, a delicate texture for another delicate texture.

Always go to the market to buy fresh fish, not a particular species. You'll notice that the number of species in this bulletin is limited. That is

because these were the freshest species available.

Most of the ingredients for the poaching liquids in this bulletin are similar. This is true in poaching recipes in books and magazines. Don't hesitate to substitute one recipe for another. And add or take away ingredients that you choose, keeping in mind that you are creating flavor differences. For example, some poaching recipes call for leeks, which are expensive. You can substitute green onions or plain onions. The resulting flavor will vary slightly, but very few of us have such discriminating tastes that we can notice the difference.

Poached fish may be served hot, warm or cold. And you can serve them just as they come from the liquid, with their delicate flavors. Or for additional flavors or variety, add a favorite sauce.

If you've never tried poaching fish in milk, you're in for a real treat. The subtle, delicate flavor is delightful. And for an entirely different taste experience, try the roux-based court bouillon used in Creole poached grouper. It requires a longer cooking time, but it's worth it.

Almost any fish can be poached, but those that flake into small pieces, such as snapper and trout, are usually best. And lean fish such as flounder and grouper are better for poaching than fatty fish such as mackerel.

After you've poached fish, you can strain and freeze the broth for later reuse. Or use it as the base for sauces.

Once you try poaching fish, you may want to buy a fish poacher. Although expensive, they are convenient and make poaching even easier. If you don't have a poacher, use a long shallow pan that will fit over two burners of the stove, an oblong electric skillet or a roaster with a bottom rack. The rack makes it easy to lift the fish out. Always use a nonreactive pan, since most poaching ingredients call for wine or lemon juice.

We recommend these poaching recipes. Evaluated on our hedonic scale of 1-5 (5=excellent, 1=poor), all these received average ratings of 4.5 or higher.

Creole Poached Grouper

2 large, skinless grouper fillets

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1/2 cup flour

1 1/2 cups chopped onion

1 cup sliced green onions, including tops

1/2 cup finely chopped celery

1/4 cup finely chopped green pepper

1 tablespoon pressed garlic

1 16-ounce can tomatoes, coarsely chopped, undrained

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme, or 1/2 teaspoon dried

1 1/2 teaspoons minced fresh basil, or 1/2 teaspoon dried

1 bay leaf

1/4 teaspoon marjoram

1/4 teaspoon allspice

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

3 lemon slices

3/4 cup dry white wine

2 1/2 cups water

cooked rice

Heat oil in large heavy pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Stir in flour. Lower heat and cook, stirring constantly, until a medium brown roux is formed, about 20 to 25 minutes. Add onion, green onions, celery, green pepper and garlic. Cook, stirring constantly, until browned, about 10 minutes.

Add tomatoes, parsley, thyme, basil, bay leaf, marjoram, allspice, salt, pepper, cayenne, lemon slices and wine. Blend thoroughly. Add water gradually, stirring constantly. Increase heat and simmer, uncovered, until thickened, about 30 minutes, stirring frequently.

Add fillets. Poach about 15 minutes, or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Remove fish to serving platter and cut into serving sizes.

Spoon sauce over fish and rice. Serves 6.

Snapper Poached in Court Bouillon

6 medium snapper fillets

6 cups water

2 cups dry white wine

1 large onion, sliced

2 carrots, sliced

4 celery stalks, with leaves, sliced

3 sprigs fresh parsley

1 bay leaf

3 sprigs fresh thyme

1 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon black peppercorns, crushed

Combine poaching ingredients in large shallow pan or fish poacher. Bring to boil. Partially cover, reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes.

Gently place fish in poaching liquid. Cook, uncovered, until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork, about 10 minutes. Carefully remove to serving platter. Serves 6.

Poached Grouper with Warm Mayonnaise

2 large skinless grouper fillets Bring poaching ingredients to boil in large, shallow pan or fish poacher. Partially cover, reduce heat and simmer 15 to 20 minutes. Meanwhile, prepare warm mayonnaise.

6 cups water

1 cup dry white wine

2 lemon slices

1 large onion, sliced

2 carrots, chopped

2 stalks celery, including leaves, sliced Gently place fillets in poaching liquid. Cook until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork, about 15 minutes. Serves 6.

3 sprigs fresh thyme

3 sprigs fresh parsley

1 bay leaf

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon whole black peppercorns

Warm Mayonnaise

2/3 cup low calorie mayonnaise Place mayonnaise in top of double boiler over heated water. Add mustard, vinegar, pepper, garlic and Tabasco, blending thoroughly. Continue to stir gently until mayonnaise is warm. Keep warm until ready to use. Spoon over warm fish.

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

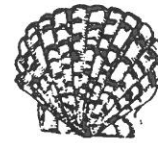
1 tablespoon white wine vinegar

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

1 teaspoon pressed garlic

1/4 teaspoon Tabasco sauce

Note: We suggest using prepared mayonnaise with added ingredients in place of homemade mayonnaise. Foods containing raw eggs, such as homemade mayonnaise, are possible carriers of Salmonella enteritidis and should be avoided. Both FDA and USDA are conducting public health campaigns to spread information about the safe cooking and handling of eggs.



Mariner's Menu is published bimonthly by the University of North Carolina Sea Grant College Program, Box 8605, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C. 27695. Vol. 2, No.2, March / April 1991. Joyce Taylor, editor. To contact Taylor, write the NCSU Seafood Laboratory, P.O. Box 1137, Morehead City, N.C. 28557. Or call 919/726-7341.

Taste and Test Panel

Seafood Lab Health, Food and Nutrition Leaders who participated in these preparations and evaluations are Claire Armstrong, Dolena Bell, Judy Blessing, Vera Gaskins, Martha Giles, Johnny Greene, Kay Holm, Anne Lawton, Betty Lewis, Lissie McNamee, Jean Morrison, Betty Motes, Mary Dudley Price, Valaree Stanley, Beulah Toll, and Dot Whitley.

UNC Sea Grant
Box 8605
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-8605

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Raleigh, NC
Permit No. 896

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED