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Cooperative Extension
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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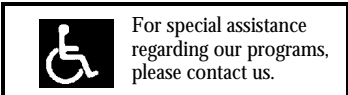
It's Easy–Cook Fish by the Inch

Swimming is easy work for fish; they don't develop tough muscles. Basic rules for cooking fish are few and easy to follow. Avoid over-cooking. There is no such thing as tough fish—unless the food preparer overcooks the fish. Fish is cooked when the protein is coagulated and the very small amount of connective tissue has been broken down. Fish is done when it “flakes easily when test with a fork.” Overcooking makes fish dry and rubbery.

Fish varies in fat content, though typically fish is lean in comparison to other kinds of meats. Lean fish needs little fat to keep it moist and flavorful. White flesh usually indicates lean fish. This includes halibut, sole, rockfish, and all shellfish. Fish with more fat generally have a colored flesh such as salmon and tuna. Handle fish as little as possible during cooking. Fish flesh is tender and delicate. If frying, turn only once and slip carefully onto the serving plate to retain an attractive appearance. Oven-frying fish is my favorite way to prepare fish because it is easy, requires less handling, uses no additional fat, and minimizes the cooking odor.

Frozen fish, fillets, and steaks may be cooked without thawing, but allow extra cooking time if you choose to try this cooking technique. An exception is Pacific Ocean Perch which is better thawed before cooking. If fish is to be breaded, and then fried or stuffed, it is easier to thaw the frozen fish first. Thaw frozen fish or shellfish in the refrigerator. Use as soon as the fish can be separated and handled. Frozen whole fish can be thawed more quickly in cold running water. Be sure to leave the fish in the package

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while thawing to avoid loss of flavor. Fish should not be thawed at room temperature to minimize the risk of food borne illness.

An average serving of fish (3-4 ounces, cooked) provides a to ½ of the day's requirement for protein. Fish is also a valuable source of iodine, calcium, and phosphorous. Fish supplies B vitamins and some fish provide additional Vitamin A and D.

It's easy to cook fish by the inch:

1. Measure the fish fillet or steak at the thickest part.
2. Heat the oven or skillet according to recipe instructions, and then allow 10 minutes of cooking time per inch of thickness.
3. Double the cooking time for a frozen product.
4. Add an extra 5 minutes for fish cooking in sauce or in foil.
5. Test for doneness. Fish should flake off easily when gently tested with a fork.

Fish is tender and easily digested and can come to the table cooked and seasoned in a variety of ways. With more fresh fish available in our markets and freshly frozen fish available, as well, why not increase your culinary skills by preparing and serving fish regularly. Season varies at my house with whim and a sense of creativity. Travel the world by adding various spices and herbs associated with different cultures to your fish-based creations.

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