From Hook to Table

Vic Dunaway

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Whether you catch all the fish that grace your table (or try to, anyway), or whether your fish dinners come from the local market, this book aims to make the handling, cleaning, cold-storing and cooking of your fish easier than it's ever been before. And the eating of them more delightful.

Here you'll find a guide to the table qualities and suggested treatment of all of the popular fish of North America, fresh water and salt--along with more than 100 recipes.

Perhaps no other food is so dependent on freshness for optimum enjoyment as fish. Beef or game or almost any other type of red meat may be improved by aging--that is, deliberately allowing the meat, under controlled conditions, to develop a flavor which is riper than that of the fresh meat. But with fish, the aim always is to maintain that delicate, fresh-caught taste; to prevent, if at all possible, even the slightest hint of ripeness.

Many kinds of fish, if properly frozen, can be eaten months after they are caught and still taste perfectly fresh. Yet the very same kinds might just as easily develop a disagreeably strong flavor only a day--even hours--after being pulled from the water. The difference, of course, is in how well they are cared for.

All too many anglers, whether in haste or ignorance, take proper care of their catch at some stages between hook and table, but not at others. All steps are crucial. A fish that is tainted will not lose its rancidity in the freezer, no matter how well you wrap and store it. Nor will a fish gently handled on the water and lovingly carried home on a dry bed of ice be any more palatable a month later if sloppily frozen.

Oddly, a lot of fishermen who treat the handling of their fish quite casually show far too much concern about cooking. It's not unusual for a person to feel that every species of fish has its own special ways of being cooked, and must be prepared just-so. These misguided souls might spend hours looking up a recipe for, say, bluefish, after they have refused to spend five minutes making sure their catch is well-iced and drained for the drive home.

Anyone who follows the few simple procedures explained in the chapters on cooking should have little trouble making a tasty dish out of any fish he might catch--whether he can or can't find its name in any of the standard family cookbooks.

And with the more involved recipes offered here, it's not the fish that might be challenging to prepare, but what goes on it or in it.

For maximum usefulness of "From Hook to Table" it is suggested that you first look up your fish in the listing in Chapter Seven. There you will get brief suggestions on how to dress the fish and how best to cook it. Then you can consult Chapter Two for cleaning instructions in step-by-step detail, and from there go to Chapter Four for basic cooking procedures.

Almost always, there is a wide choice of possibilities for any food fish. It's up to you to decide whether you want simply fried, broiled or baked fish, or want to try one of the more than 100 recipes in Chapter Six.

For outdoor cooking, look at Chapter Five.

But for all that advice, you probably won't be happy with your meal unless you pay careful attention to the proper handling of your catch, as outlined in Chapters One and Three.



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Helen McCleary:

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