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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, March 31, 1933.

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Subject: "Cooking Fish to Conserve Food Value." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Again the subject of cooking to conserve food value comes up. It's a subject that we can hardly think about too often in days of economic crisis like these. For we all believe in getting every vestige of food value out of every ounce of food that comes into the house, of avoiding waste and making the most of what we have.

Our special topic for today is cooking fish to conserve food value. Fish is important for its protein -- protein of the same quality as that in meat, eggs, and milk. Some fish, such as salmon, is rich in vitamins A, D, and G. Fish also contributes minerals to the diet. As a source of iodine, for example, salt-water fish and other sea food are unsurpassed.

Since fish is such a valuable food, it deserves cooking that will bring out its very best flavor. Food value and flavor -- every up-to-date cook these days aims to preserve them both. Perfectly cooked fish is well done and tender and plump, never the least bit dry or shriveled. What's the secret of cooking fish so that it comes out that way? I'll tell you what the specialists say. They say, "Use a moderate temperature." Since fish is a protein food, you apply the same general rules of cooking that you use for other protein foods. Whether you're broiling or baking or cooking fish in any other way, keep the temperature moderate for the greater part of the time. Moderate heat allows the fish to cook evenly, keeps the protein tender, and doesn't drive out the juices. Of course, to brown the outside, you'll start with a higher temperature, or else you'll increase the heat at the end of cooking. You see, the scientific principle is the same as in cooking meats, only with fish you have no tender and less tender cuts to bother with. The two types of fish are the fat and the lean. Fat or oily fish include salmon, mackerel, shad and herring. Lean fish include cod, haddock, halibut and flounder and many of the smaller fresh-water fish. Does this make any difference in cooking? Yes, say the experts. The fat kinds generally are better broiled or baked. But the lean kinds need extra fat in the cooking to give them richness and flavor. So they are better fried or served with a sauce.

So much for the general rules. Now let's consider the different ways of cooking fish. Broiling, first. Suppose you want to broil a fish, such as a shad for example. First you make sure all scales are off. Then you split the fish down the backbone, clean it and wipe it dry inside and out. Then you spread it, skin side down, on a greased baking sheet, or on a very shallow roasting pan.



Fish is inclined to stick to the broiler rack. Then it's very hard to turn. So use a flat surface. If you are broiling one of the more oily fish, you won't need to add fat. If you are broiling a very large fish, first put it in a moderate oven for 15 to 20 minutes, just long enough to heat through. Then put it into the broiler for another 15 to 20 minutes or so, again at a moderate heat. When the fish is nice and brown and evenly cooked, slide it off onto a hot platter. Add seasonings, garnish with parsley and lemon. Then it's ready for the table. If you are broiling small fish, you'll find that they are often done by the time they are well browned.

Now about baking -- another good way to cook fish. Here again you'll use a moderate temperature. You'll want your oven to register about 350 degrees F. -- a moderate oven. When you bake a large fish, put it on the rack in the pan, just as you would a roast of meat. And don't add water. If the fish is one of the lean variety, and many become dry during baking, lay a few strips of salt pork or bacon over the top, or baste it occasionally with melted fat. A very oily fish will supply its own fat for basting. Filets of haddock with a well-seasoned bread crumb stuffing between and bacon on top are delicious this way.

So much for broiling and baking. Now about cooking fish in water. Here again you use the rule of moderate heat. You simmer the fish gently, ne or boil it. Suppose you have a two or three-pound piece of fresh salmon or cod to cook this way. Wrap it up in cheesecloth first to make it easy to handle without breaking. Put it in the kettle and pour over it barely enough water to cover. Add salt to season, cover the kettle and cook very slowly. Fish has no tough connective tissue, so it simmers tender very quickly. This is an easy, economical way to cook fish. And it's delicious served with sauce. Egg sauce -- sliced hard-cooked eggs in white sauce is good. So is creole sauce made of canned tomatoes and green peppers and spicy seasonings.

We mustn't forget still another favorite way of cooking fish -- frying. For frying, of course, the fat must be hot when you put the fish in to brown it. But once it's brown, lower the heat and let it cook slowly until done. This gives a crisp brown crust and doesn't dry out the fish.

There's the whole story. Moderate heat is the secret of well-cooked fish, whether you're broiling, baking, cooking in water or frying in a pan. You never use high heat except to brown fish. Broiling and baking are good ways to cook oily fish; frying is good for lean fish. Add fat when you cook lean fish; oily fish supplies its own.

Just time for a menu for a Friday fish dinner. Here it is: Simmered fish with creole sauce (Cod, halibut, salmon or other fresh fish); Boiled rice; Salad of green beans and chopped mild onions; and, for dessert, Hot raisin cup cakes and Hot tea or coffee.

Monday: "Inexpensive Spring Salads."

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