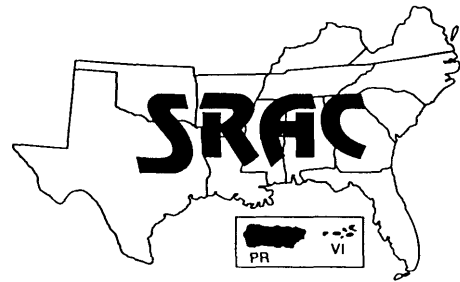


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You Can Do Catfish

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From the catch to the consumer, catfish is a delicious protein food that can add variety to your diet. People are eating more catfish than ever before. Catfish is not only eaten in coastal regions; it is now available to most of the country. People want catfish for a variety of reasons: it is low in calories, quick and easy to prepare, and, of course, it tastes great! It's no surprise to those who have been eating catfish for years that its popularity is growing.

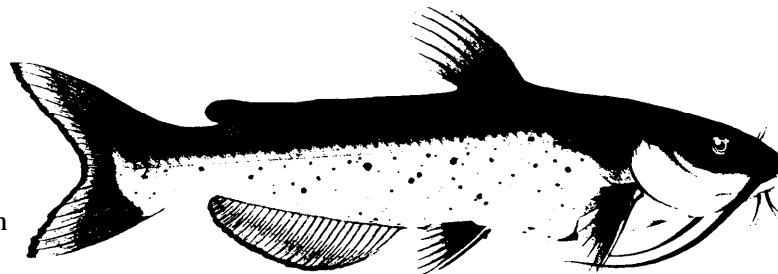
Commercial information

Most catfish eaten by the consumer is produced on catfish farms. It is one of the cleanest, most carefully grown food protein on the market today. Up to forty million pounds of farm-raised catfish can be processed in one month.

Channel catfish can be classified in one of four groups while at the farm: brood fish, or the fish that produce offspring; fry, the newly hatched fish; fingerlings, or young catfish; and marketable fish, those you see in restaurants or your grocer's seafood case. Catfish are usually marketed after they have reached between 1 and 1 1/2 pounds.

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Flavor

One advantage to farm-raised catfish is that the flavor is consistently mild. The delicate taste of catfish is like that of a sweet whitefish. The mild flavor of the catfish means that it can be easily adapted into many recipes. It is often possible to use catfish in recipes that call for other fish, or even poultry, pork or beef. Adding catfish to your diet not only adds variety, but also introduces a healthy, low-fat alternative.

The food guide pyramid

To help Americans choose a healthy diet, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the Food Guide Pyramid. This pyramid can help answer the question, "What should I eat and how much to stay healthy?" The pyramid visually guides consumers to eat a variety of foods while avoiding excessive fats and sugars. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests 2-3 servings per day from the Meat, Poultry, Fish & Dry Beans Group. Catfish is a good choice

from this group. It is a source of a complete protein while, unlike some foods from the protein group, is still low in fat and cholesterol. One 3 1/2-ounce serving supplies almost half the total protein required by the body each day. The serving size is easily remembered

as about the size of a deck of playing cards.

Nutritional information

Catfish has about 120 calories for every 3.5-ounce serving eaten. As with most seafood, this fish has fewer calories per serving than poultry or pork. Catfish is naturally low in sodium, which is useful information to those on a low-salt diet or those trying to avoid or reduce high blood pressure. Catfish, while easy to chew and digest, also contains calcium, iron and other minerals for better overall health.

Forms available

There are several forms of catfish available from your local market or grocer. The term dressed means that the catfish has been cleaned, fins removed, and head and tail cut off. About 2/3 of the dressed fish is edible. When you buy catfish from your grocer, make sure the eyes are clear, not dull and sunken. Flesh should be firm to the touch, and there should be no

strong odor. **Steaks** are cross-sections from 3/4 to 1 1/2 inches thick. They usually have a piece of backbone in the center. About 85 percent of the steak is edible. **Fillet**s are the sides of the fish cut away from the backbone. They are usually boneless. All of the fillet is edible. Allow 1/3 pound per serving. You may find some fillets in your grocer's seafood case coated or marinated with flavors and spices such as lemon-butter, cajun, or mesquite. These options are certainly time savers for preparing meals in minutes. If you buy steaks or fillets from a seafood dealer, make sure flesh is firm and color is consistent throughout meat.

Stretching your food dollar

You can stretch your budget by stretching your pound of catfish. For example, a pound of broiled catfish fillets will give approximately 3 servings. One pound of catfish prepared in catfish salad yields 4 servings. One pound of fish served in casseroles, stir-fry, or soup can be stretched to yield 6, 7, or even 8 servings.

Frozen catfish

Many of the previously mentioned forms are available not only as fresh catfish but frozen as well. **Due to improved freezing methods, frozen fish is equal to fresh fish in nutrition, appearance and flavor.** When buying frozen fish, make sure the flesh is solidly frozen and in tight moisture-proof packaging. Frozen items should be held at 0°F. The term "Individually Quick Frozen" (I. Q. F.) indicates that the fish has been frozen by a rapid freezing method that minimizes loss of flavor and texture.

Buying tips

If you buy catfish from your local market or grocer, here is some other information to keep in mind:

1. Ask friends for the best seafood counter in your area. Make sure

you use a reputable, licensed dealer.

2. Seafood should be free of blood, bruises and discolorations.
3. Shop for fish last and return home quickly. On very hot days, ask your salesperson to wrap your seafood in ice or carry an ice chest in the car.
4. Use **Quality grading** as a guide to purchase products of high quality. Grading is an added step after inspection in which quality is determined. The "US Grade A1" mark indicates that the product is of high quality, uniform in size, practically free of blemishes, in excellent condition, and has good flavor and odor.
5. **Open dating** refers to the "use by" or "good until" date and can be used to judge the quality and shelf life of packaged, perishable products.

Storing catfish at home

Catfish can usually be stored in your refrigerator at 32° to 38°F for one or two days. At temperatures above 38°F, bacteria can grow rapidly and cause the fish to spoil. If you freeze the catfish, make sure the package is tight-fitting. Little or no airspace helps maintain

quality. The freezer should be at 0°F. The frozen catfish should be used within 3 months.

In addition to keeping the catfish at proper temperatures, remember these facts to help reduce your risk of foodborne illness:

1. Wash your hands, cutting boards and countertops. Add 1 tablespoon liquid bleach to a gallon of water for a simple sanitizer. Use plastic cutting boards since wooden cutting boards cannot be sanitized properly.
2. Defrost frozen fish overnight in refrigerator or under running water in sink. Never let fish thaw at room temperature or in standing water.
3. Keep raw meat of any kind away from cooked foods or foods that need no more preparation before eating. Bacteria from the raw product can get on other food if you're not careful.

Cooking

One of the reasons catfish is ideal to use in meal planning is that it can be used so many different ways. The "10 minute rule" says to cook fish for 10 minutes per inch.



Catfish can be prepared by many cooking methods, including baking, broiling and grilling. (Photograph courtesy of The Catfish Institute)

Fish that is less than 1 inch thick should be cooked for less time. Use the "10 minute per inch" rule when cooking fish except for microwaving or deep frying. For example, a 1-inch thick piece of fish should be baked 5 minutes on one side, turned over, and baked 5 minutes on the other side for a total of 10 minutes. Fish less than 1/2 inch thick does not need to be turned. Fish is done when opaque and flakes easily with a fork.

- **Bake** fish by adding a small amount of liquid such as broth or lemon juice. Bake at 400°F.
- **Broil** 4 to 5 inches away from heat.
- **Grill** fish, basting with your favorite sauce. Turn halfway through cooking.
- **Steam** fish by placing on a rack 2 inches above liquid.
- **Sauté** by adding fish and vegetables with oil or liquid in a non-stick pan. Cook over medium heat.

- **Microwave**, allowing 3 to 6 minutes per pound of boneless fish cooked on high (100 percent power). Rotate halfway through cooking time.

Leftovers

After cooking, return uneaten seafood to refrigerator as soon as possible, but no longer than 2 hours. Seafood that has been left at room temperature for longer than 2 hours should be thrown away. Eat refrigerated leftovers within two days. Reheat leftovers to bubbling, which is approximately 175°F.

RECIPES

Catfish Pasta Primavera

8 ounces fettuccine
1/2 small red pepper, cut into strips
1/2 small yellow pepper, cut into strips
1/2 small green pepper, cut into strips
4 ounces pea pods, trimmed
6 green onions, cut into strips
2 tablespoons shallots
1/4 cup butter or margarine
1 cup dry white wine or chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 pound catfish fillets, cut into pieces
4 large sun-dried tomatoes in olive oil, drained and coarsely chopped (optional)
2/3 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup chopped fresh dill or 1 tablespoon dried dill
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese
Freshly ground pepper

Cook fettuccine according to package directions; drain. Meanwhile, in a large skillet cook red pepper, yellow pepper, green pepper, pea pods, onions and shallots in butter or margarine until peppers are just crisp-tender. Remove vegetables from skillet.

Add white wine, salt and pepper to skillet, bring to boil. Add catfish. Return to boil; reduce heat. Simmer, uncovered, about 3 minutes or until catfish flakes easily. Stir occasionally.

Add sun-dried tomatoes, if desired. Return vegetables to skillet, tossing gently to coat. Place cooked fettuccine in large serving bowl. Add catfish mixture, tossing to coat. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and dill. Stir gently to mix. Serve with fresh Parmesan cheese and pepper. Makes 4 servings.

Catfish Parmesan

6 pan dressed whole catfish or catfish fillets
2 cups dry bread crumbs
3/4 cup Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup chopped parsley
1 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon oregano
1/4 teaspoon basil
2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
3/4 cup margarine or cooking oil
lemon wedges

Combine bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese, parsley, paprika, oregano, basil, salt and pepper. Dip catfish in melted margarine or oil and roll in crumb mixture. Arrange fish in a well-greased baking dish 14x9x2 inches. Bake in a 375° oven for 25 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Cooking time will be less if using fillets. Garnish with lemon wedges. Serves 6.

Catfish Court Bouillon

(Court Bouillon pronounced coo-bee-yen)

1/2 cup cooking oil
1/2 cup all purpose flour
1 cup chopped onion
1 cup chopped celery
1 cup chopped green pepper
4 cloves garlic, minced
6 cups chicken broth, fish stock, or water
1 15-ounce can tomato sauce
1 10-ounce can Rotel® tomatoes
2 bay leaves
3 pounds catfish fillets
creole seasoning
8 cups hot cooked rice

In large kettle or Dutch oven stir together oil and flour until smooth. Cook over medium-high heat until mixture boils, stirring constantly. Reduce heat to medium and stir constantly about 10 minutes or until mixture turns a medium brown. Add onions, celery, green pepper and garlic. Cook and stir until tender. Stir in chicken broth, fish stock or water. Add tomato sauce, tomatoes and bay leaves. Bring to boil; reduce heat. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, cut fish into bite-size pieces. Sprinkle lightly with creole seasoning. Add catfish to tomato mixture. Cover and simmer for 25 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Season to taste with creole seasoning. Remove and discard bay leaves.

Mound 1 cup rice on each serving plate. Spoon catfish mixture over rice. Makes 8 servings,

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