

# Sea Food Buying Pointers that Build Club Food Fame

By ROBERT E. LOVE

FISH forms one of the most important items on the club menu today. Fish is considered by many to be one of the best, cheapest, and most digestible of all foods. It is very easily masticated on account of the loose texture of the flesh and is very digestible, being readily dissolved in the stomach and absorbed in the blood. This fact of its ready decomposition accounts for the necessity of its being absolutely fresh, or else preserved by one of the several preservative processes—salted, smoked, or pickled in vinegar and spices.

In salted fish, which is a low-priced substitute for fresh fish, we have a higher protein content pound per pound, as some water is drawn out in the salting process, either dry salted (herring, cod, halibut, haddock) or brine salted (herring, salmon and mackerel). The salted fish must be freshened before use, which may be done by placing the fish flesh side down in a large pan of water for 12 to 48 hours, according to taste and size and thickness. Thus the salt crystallized out on the flesh side dissolves, dropping to the bottom of the pan. Less freshening is required if fish is to be boiled.

The club steward should purchase the finest quality fish obtainable at all times. He cannot be too critical in the selection of fish because in my opinion there is nothing that will ruin a meal any easier than a tainted or spoiled fish plate. Always bear in mind that no matter how skillful the cook may be, he is unable to disguise a fish dish because the good and bad qualities are accentuated in the cooking.

There is such a wide variety of fresh and salt water fish available at all seasons of the year at fair and reasonable prices that there is really no excuse or reason to purchase a poorer quality of the higher priced ones. The market value of fish is affected by: (1) The waters from which the fish come; (2) the season taken; (3) food on which they have grown. The fresh fish usually come from clear, cold, deep waters with rocky or sandy bottoms.

The shad and salmon are the best during spawning.

## Fish Buying Factors

The following factors govern the purchase of fresh and salt water fish:

1. The freshness, which can be ascertained by the bright red gills, the firm, elastic flesh slightly colored with blood vessels, muscular stiffness to a greater or less degree, and the eyes are clear and bulging.

2. The weight or size, depending upon the purpose for which they are purchased.

3. The type purchased, either scaled and dressed (entrails removed) or in the round, heads on or off.

4. The species or variety, depending in some cases upon the districts.

In the winter months four types of fish are offered: the fresh, both salt water and fresh, and winter-caught. This last mentioned variety refers to lake trout and whitefish, etc., which are caught mainly in the Canadian lakes and frozen upon the field. The pan frozen are fish frozen in the height of the season in the Great Lakes region; the frozen fillet of fresh water fish, which are cleaned, dressed and filleted out where they are caught and have a thin coating of ice over the entire surface, which is a patented method, I have been given to understand.

This method turns out a nice product which when leached out is almost as good as the fresh, retaining much of its firmness and original flavor. In regard to the four types of fish offered in the winter months, the fresh and the winter caught are probably the best, as the pan frozen tend to break up easily in broiling. The best quality frozen fish has the characteristics of fresh fish plus shiny skin, scales strongly adhering to the skin, and a fresh smell.

## Selecting the Fish

A few pointers on the purchase of fish are now in order. Do not commit the error of ordering so many pounds of trout or

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whitefish, etc., but know accurately the size you can use to most advantage. As for example, if you wish to serve two of the smaller variety, buy the three to a pound. The one-half to three-quarter pound fish usually goes very nicely for a la carte service. Likewise, test scores will clearly demonstrate the proper size to purchase of the other items. In some varieties the smaller size, such as the two pound, is not so desirable as the five to seven pound size for broiling, as they are quite thin and tend to dry out rapidly.

The finest whitefish are of the humpback variety, with a small soft pinkish nose and mouth, and are very white in color. They are quite fat with a fine flavored flesh of pinkish color, and average from one to eight pounds in weight. A peculiar fact in connection with the whitefish is that the farther north you go, you will discover that the shading on the skin is much darker and the flesh a little more coarse. The brook trout are sometimes known as the aristocrats of the fresh waters. They are scaleless and fairly soft, the unfortunate part being that they do not carry well and therefore must be very fresh. They are usually bought from one-third to one pound each.

### **Pike and Perch Keep Well**

The firm fleshed lake trout have an excellent flavor, with the flesh slightly yellow in color. Perhaps the most desirable as well as the most profitable is the five to seven pound for a la carte service. The blue pike and yellow perch are also very firm fleshed fish and boast an extra quality of storing very satisfactory. Of all the fresh water fish, they perhaps lose less flavor in cold storage than any of the others. The blue pike is a lean, slender fish, which are caught more frequently in the smaller size, the one-third to half pound proving the most profitable. They are very low priced and have sometimes sold as low as eight cents per pound.

The yellow perch weighs a little more, averaging from one-third to two pounds. Because more of the smaller size are caught, there is a premium on the larger ones. They are distinguished from the salt water white perch by their deep yellow stripes. The yellow pike are perhaps one of the finest flavored fish caught in the Great Lakes but are somewhat wasty on account of their large fins and heads. The fresh water herring has as a chief objection the firm network of bone that is difficult to remove. They are sold more fre-

quently smoked, as the higher class trade seldom buys them fresh.

The codfish is a firm white fleshed fish with a very good flavor. The color of the flesh darkens according to the age. The big cod is quite wasty due to its large stomach walls and bones. The six to eight pound size is very desirable. The finest of the mackerel family is the Spanish, which is caught in the Southern waters and is a light silvery blue. It is marked from the fresh by its fin-like tail, which is almost perpendicular to its body.

The finest flavored scallops perhaps are the pearl scallops, which are quite small and not good for frying, but they cream very nicely and also can be used for scallops in coquille. In the buying of lobsters it is most important to secure them from the nearest point possible because when they are too long in transit there results a high shrinkage due to the dead and the bruised. The steward must also consider when he is given price quotations the express rates between points of purchase and delivery, and whether or not there are any carrying charges in addition to the express rates. In regard to oysters, the medium salt flavored is the most desirable for regular usage.

The large variety of clams or quohaugs are used for broth and chowders. The soft shell crabs are classified as to size and thereby priced. This division includes culls, medium, prime, and extra large. The hard shell crabs are very rarely shipped alive, being usually cooked at the point where they are caught. They are used for crab meat in the lump, flake and claw. The former is the finest, the flake is more or less shredded, and the claw meat is a little bit tougher and consequently priced lower than the other two grades. In conclusion, may I again emphasize that only the best quality fish foods should be purchased at all times.

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