

Cutting and Freezing Salmon and Steelhead at Home

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PREPARING salmon, steelhead, and large trout for cooking can be done by filleting and cutting into sections, as well as by using the customary method of steaking. Steaking is not covered in this publication in order to review other ideas and methods of preparing any round, long-bodied fish for the table.

Filleting has the advantage of retaining moisture and flavor during cooking because the muscles are not cut crosswise into short lengths. Also, filleting provides the cook with a choice of broiling, baking, barbecuing, or frying pieces of the fish.

Cutting the fish into chunks or whole sections is favored for poaching, baking, or freezing for future use. This is a quick way to process large fish when you come home from a fishing trip. Chunking is also effective in preventing exposure of large surfaces of raw meat to air or water while freezing or thawing. A whole section or chunk preserved by freezing can easily be steaked or filleted later when it is almost thawed.

For the best utilization and enjoyment of fish, decide how you want it served on the table, or frozen, and then make the cuts accordingly.

Filleting

After the fish has been cleaned, the first step in filleting a steelhead, salmon, or large trout is to remove its head. Insert the knife under the tough, bony collar located at the point of the shoulder, cut it free to the base of the skull, and then cut down through the backbone and on out the other side.

Filleting as described here merely splits the fish in half and removes the backbone. The ribs are left in each half. After removing the head, start splitting the fish in half by inserting the knife on the dorsal side along the backbone and cutting the meat loose from one side all the way to the tail. To cut the ventral side of the tail section free, lift the loose meat and slide the knife along the back-

bone and cut from the vertical spines to the tail. Then place the heel of the knife blade at the point of attachment of ribs to the backbone and cut the ribs off by drawing the knife forward until the fish is split. Repeat the procedure to remove the backbone from the other half of the fish. It may take a little skinning type action and experimentation to be sure all the meat is removed from the bone. Once split in half, the fish is ready to be cut up into the size and shape of pieces requested by the cook. The choices are shown in Figure 1.

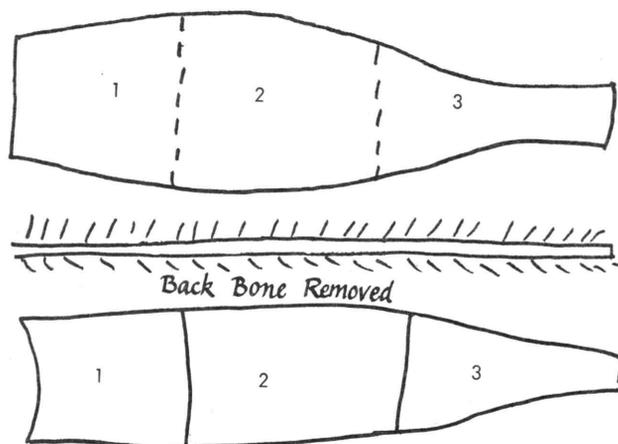


Figure 1. The split or filleted fish.

With the fish split in half, cut the tail section (No. 3 in Figure 1) off for a special boneless steak. Leave the skin attached and fry or broil to suit your taste. This piece always is overcooked if left attached and cooked with the larger and thicker parts of the fish. It is a special treat when cooked right, and the boneless piece of fish is safe for small children.

The No. 1 and No. 2 fillets (Figure 1) are excellent pieces for broiling, barbecuing, or baking in a shallow baking dish. Also, on fish up to eight pounds in weight, they can be cut into serving size pieces and fried. On winter steelhead, the scales stick tight and the skin is always left on.



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With ocean-caught salmon, the scales can be removed or left on, whichever suits the pleasure of the cook.

Chunking or Whole Sections

To serve a family of four to six, a 6 to 10 pound fish can be conveniently cut into three pieces. Larger fish could be cut into several pieces, depending on the number of people to be served and the intended use of the fish.

In cutting a 6 to 10 pound fish into chunks or whole sections, make the first cut just forward of the dorsal and ventral fins (Figure 2). Make the

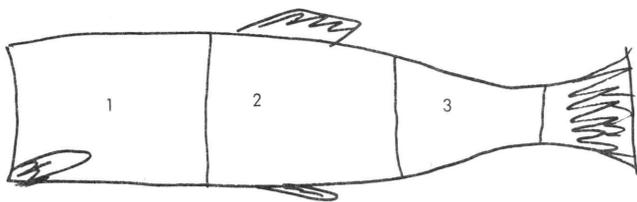


Figure 2. Chunking or whole sections.

second cut at the end of the body cavity. The third cut can remove the tail if you plan to freeze the piece for future use. However, if you plan to use it fresh, fillet the section without cutting off the tail.

Freezing

For the person who loses frozen packages in the home freezer or just plain leaves them there too long before using, try freezing the fish first and then sealing them in ice. Ice removes all contact with air and reduces locker burn to a minimum. Sealed in ice, fish can keep palatable for as long as a year.

Either fillets or chunks of 6 to 10 pound fish can be frozen successfully in used juice cans or two-quart waxed milk cartons. Larger fish will require larger containers. Tightly wrap fillets (cut as illustrated in Figure 1) in plastic and place them in waterproof containers to freeze. The plastic keeps water from soaking into the fish while thawing. Fish cut into chunks or sections do not need a plastic wrapping. The skin serves the purpose better.

After putting fillets or chunks into waterproof containers, label the containers properly and put them in your 0° home freezer. Let the fish freeze solid before adding water. By the next day, or sooner, add sufficient water to cover the fish by at least three-fourths of an inch. For best flavor and eating, use the fish within nine months, but if you misplace a package and find it a year or so later, prepare it with confidence. It will still be good food if it has been completely sealed in water.