

the lure of COD

Gold may have drawn the Spaniards to the New World, but cod brought the English and spurred the growth of the country. Cod was our ubiquitous resource—lower a net into the Atlantic and it came up overflowing.

Portuguese immigrants put their culinary imprints on cod, bringing new ingredients and a fearless fancy for cooking seafood and meat together. That there are so many ways of cooking cod—1,001 recipes, say the Portuguese—is due in part to the days when the fish was bountiful. “It was reliable, plentiful, and familiar,” says Sandy Oliver, a food historian from Islesboro, Maine.

But cod is now in decline. To help Atlantic populations recover, regulations include closed seasons, quotas, and gear restrictions. Pacific cod faces fewer challenges, as stocks remain healthy. Sustainability experts recommend buying Pacific cod caught with bottom long-line or hook-and-line fishing. “With the proper management, we would expect to see [Atlantic] cod recover,” says Teri Frady of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Fisheries Service in the Northeast.

Cautious optimism makes sense in light of cod’s historical resilience. “Now you see salt cod at elegant parties,” says Sandy. “Salt cod was subsistence fare during the Depression. Here’s a fish that’s made its way up the social ladder.”



Poached Cod with Roasted Peppers, Capers, and Spinach

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- 3 medium red bell peppers, halved and seeded
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons capers
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1½ pounds cod loin fillets
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup water
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 (9-ounce) bags spinach

Place pepper halves, cut sides down, on a lightly greased baking sheet. Broil 20 minutes or until peppers are blistered. Cool and remove skins.

Cut bell peppers into ½-inch strips. Combine peppers, ½ cup olive oil, and next 4 ingredients. Cover and chill.

Place cod fillets in a lightly greased, shallow roasting pan. Pour wine and water over fish. Cover loosely with foil. Bake at 450° for 15 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Carefully remove fish from pan to a serving platter; cover and keep warm.

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large Dutch oven over medium heat. Add garlic; sauté 2 minutes or until lightly browned. Reduce heat

to low; gradually add spinach. Cook 2 minutes or just until wilted, stirring constantly.

Place fish on top of spinach, and top with marinated peppers and capers. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

Note: For flavor and texture, we prefer slightly wilted spinach. To avoid health concerns, thoroughly cook the spinach, or substitute kale, arugula, or other greens.

Pan-roasted Tequila-Lime Cod

David Valleau’s recipe comes from the chef’s experiences working in small fish restaurants in Southern California. “It’s an adaptation of what cooks from Guadalajara made for themselves in the kitchen,” says David. Lime juice, cilantro, and pepper, he adds, “is the holy trinity—acid, spice, and herb—of Mexican fish tacos.” When it comes to purchasing and handling cod, David suggests adhering to the seafood importers’ motto: quick, cold, and clean. “What’s most important,” he says, “is how fresh it is, how quickly it gets to market.”

- 2 (6-ounce) cod fillets
- Sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons tequila
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 small serrano chile, seeded and chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

Pat fillets dry, and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a cast iron or

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