

Flaky White Fish

These fish all share a similar size and texture of flake. Their flavor is generally quite mild, ranging from the blank canvas of tilapia to the savory, cool flavor of cod and halibut.

CATFISH: The many market varieties of catfish all have similar eating characteristics. Flavors range from sweet and clean to slightly muddy. I'm particularly fond of fish harvested from brackish or salt-waters.

fry, roast, sauté, stew

CHEEKS: This cut from the head of the fish, most often available from the cod family, skate, halibut, and monkfish, are all cooked the same way. They render a very gelatinous sauce when sautéed with butter or olive oil, parsley, and sherry. They also are fantastic added to stews.

sauté, stew

COD: Both Atlantic and Pacific cod cook in much the same way. It is a meaty, white-fleshed fish with a large flake.

fry, poach, roast, salted, sauté, steam, stew

DOGFISH, SPINY: This small shark has a firm, monkfish-like texture, though it flakes delicately. Very sweet, briny flavor.

broil, fry, grill, roast, sauté, smoke, stew

HADDOCK: This staple of northern cuisine, especially in Maine, is very similar to cod, with a mild taste, firm texture, and small, dense flake.

broil, fry, roast, sauté, smoke, stew

HAKE: This northern fish, a relative of cod, has a very sweet flavor, mild brininess, and a very small flake that requires delicate cooking.

broil, roast, sauté, steam

HALIBUT: The largest of the flatfish, this snow-white fleshed fish is often very large in size, with a pleasantly mild, blank canvas-like flavor.

fry, poach, roast, sauté, stew

POLLOCK, ALASKAN: This is the most common whitefish variety found in many packaged products, such as fish sticks and breaded fillets. Its clean mild flavor is a great canvas for many flavors, though it can be overpowered by too strong of a pairing. It has a benchmark flaky texture with a sweet, moderate flavor.

broil, fry, sauté, stew

SABLEFISH: This incredibly svelte queen of the northern Pacific is about as elegant as seafood gets. It's also known as black cod though its silken texture has led to the unofficial nickname butterfish, which describes its character rather well. An elastic texture when raw yields to a beautiful flake. A mild but broad flavor pairs well with acidic ingredients and herbs.
broil, fry, poach, roast, sauté, smoke

TILAPIA: Best used as a gateway fish, tilapia has a very mild flavor and toothsome texture that make it a good canvas for the ingredients it's paired with. It is very lean and is always sold skin off.
fry, poach, roast, sauté, stew

WHITING: Very similar to hake in its fine texture and very small flake (though not as sweet), whiting pairs very well with smoke and acidic flavors. Best cooked with the skin on, though removed before serving.
broil, poach, sauté, smoke, steam

FLAT FISH

While the fish in this category, with their very small flake and delicate structure, differ from cod-like fish greatly in terms of texture, the flavors are all similar. They perform well in similar preparations.

DAB: This small flatfish has characteristics of sole: a delicate texture, small flake, and sweet taste. It is best prepared whole.
broil, fry, grill

FLOUNDER: This group encompasses a large variety of species, all with very similar culinary characteristics. The mild-flavored, thin white to off-grey fillets are best served with the skin off.
fry, poach, fillet, steam

HALIBUT: Though halibut is a flatfish, due to its large size, it cooks more like a flaky white fish (see above).
fry, poach, roast, sauté, stew

SOLE: The most delicate of the flatfish, sole is very similar to flounder, with which it is interchangeable. Its smooth, delicate white meat has a mild and elegant flavor.
fry, poach, fillet, steam

Deep-Poached Halibut with Green Goddess Dressing

*Best for Flaky White-Fleshed Fish,
Orange-Fleshed Fish, or Shellfish*

Serves 4

Green Goddess Dressing

Makes about 2 cups

1 cup mayonnaise
1 (2-ounce) can oil-packed
anchovies
1 bunch watercress, trimmed
1 bunch tarragon, leaves only
1 bunch parsley, leaves only
Juice of 1 lemon
Salt to taste

Combine all ingredients,
except the mayonnaise,
in a food processor and
purée until mostly smooth
and bright green. Let sit
at least 1 hour and up to
overnight to allow flavors to
meld. Add the mayonnaise
and pulse to combine.

4 4-6 ounce portions halibut fillet
Salt
2 cups red or white wine
2 cup red or white wine vinegar
6 cups water
6 fresh thyme sprigs
3 garlic cloves, smashed
4 wide peels of orange zest
10 juniper berries
1 bay leaf
2 apples, shaved (try Honeycrisp or Pink Lady)
1 bulb of fennel, shaved
8 sliced radishes
1/2 bunch parsley, leaves picked and torn

Season the fish with salt on all sides and let it rest for 20 minutes.
Combine wine, vinegar, water, thyme, garlic, orange zest, juniper berries,
and bay leaf in a large pot. Season with salt. Heat over medium-high
heat until 180°F. Add the fish to the poaching liquid. Reduce the heat to
low. Use a thermometer to maintain the heat between 165°F and 175°F.
Cook for 10 to 12 minutes per inch of thickness.

Remove the fish from the cooking liquid. If the skin has been left on,
gently remove it by using a fish spatula. Discard the skin.

Spread Green Goddess Dressing (sidebar) on a plate.

Make a salad of apple, fennel, radishes and parsley leaves. Arrange the
salad on the plate. Place the fish atop the sauce and salad.

Pan-Roasted Halibut with Lemon, Olives, and Rosemary

Serves 4

4 halibut portions, skin on and scored
Salt
6 tablespoons butter, divided
1 lemon, thinly sliced
1/3 cup cured green or black olives
4 stalks rosemary

Season the fish with salt and let it rest for 20 minutes. In a sauté pan over medium heat, melt 3 tablespoons of the butter. Add the lemon slices, olives, and rosemary. Cook until the lemon slices begin to soften. Add the fish to the pan skin side down. Cook undisturbed until the fish is almost done. Flip the fish to finish cooking. Top each fillet with pieces of the remaining butter. Serve with lemon slices, olives, and crispy rosemary leaves.

Braised Salt Cod with Fennel

Serves 4

1 pound salt cod, cut into 4 portions
6 tablespoons butter, divided
2 fennel bulbs, cut into 1/2-inch wedges
2 oranges, juiced
1 cup white wine
Salt
2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives or parsley

Soak the salt cod for 36–48 hours in several changes of water. Remove from the soaking liquid and pat dry. In a large pot over medium-high heat, melt 3 tablespoons of the butter. Add the fennel and cook until it begins to brown. Reduce the heat to medium, add the orange juice and wine, and season with salt. Cover and simmer until the fennel is barely softened, 7–8 minutes. Place the salt cod on top of the fennel and reduce the heat to low. Cover and cook for 12–14 minutes. Remove the salt cod and fennel. Reduce the remaining liquid to a syrup and whisk in the remaining 3 tablespoons of butter and the herbs. Drizzle the sauce over the fish and fennel, and serve warm or at room temperature.