

Handling Fish the Right Way for Eating

Basic Steps

1. Knock the fish out using a small club
2. Bleed out the fish
3. Gut and gill the fish
4. Ice the fish
5. Freeze or cook the fish

Detailed Explanation of Field Dressing

1. Knock the fish on the top of the head using a small club. If the fish is small enough you can use needle-nose pliers. The goal isn't to kill them, but just to knock them out so they don't flop around and damage the meat.

2. Bleed the fish by cutting or ripping the gills, which will allow the blood to be pumped out. I normally just grab the gills with my needle-nose pliers and rip them out. You will know if it worked right away because the fish's blood is pumped through the gills, so you should see lots of blood.

It's best to put the fish into water while it bleeds. This will prevent the blood from clotting. I put small fish into a water-filled bucket that I keep on board. Bigger fish can temporarily be hung over the side on a stringer if there are no sea lions present. You only need to bleed them for about five minutes.

3. Gut the fish and remove the gills. This is important because it prevents 'belly burn' caused by the fish's own acids, enzymes, and bacteria. This can be a big contributor to the mushy effect. Be sure to leave the head attached to comply with length and species identification requirements.
4. Put the fish on ice. There should be ice surrounding each fish in the cooler. Make sure to allow the water to drain away from the fish - you don't want your fish floating in slimy melt water. Sometimes I'll put the fish in a garbage bag or zipper freezer bag to separate it from the melted water in the summertime.

At Home

Remember to freeze or ice any fish you are not planning on immediately eating. At home, I'll usually do the final steps like filleting, skinning, and de-boning the fish right before I freeze or cook it.

Refrigerator Storage

A refrigerator alone is not cold enough to store seafood or fish. You need to keep the temperatures ice cold (32 degrees F) to prevent bacterial growth. If storing the fish in a refrigerator, put it in a zip lock bag in a large bowl surrounded by ice. It will keep this way for several days. More can be found [here](#).

Comments

If you decide to keep fish that you've caught yourself, the quality should be better than anything you get at your local grocery store or fish market. So whenever I hear people say things like, "that fish was mushy", or "it was really fishy smelling", I really have to raise an eyebrow. If you want your fish to be fresh, you need to think like a commercial fisherman. Ever see a commercial fishing boat dragging fish around on a stringer, or leaving fish out on the deck to bake in the sun? Of course not, because the fish they catch have to be delivered to port, and then trucked to market. Even if you buy freshly delivered fish at a market, it probably was caught three to four days earlier. Fish you catch yourself is straight out of the water, so there is no excuse for mushy or smelly fish!

Links

[Fish Handling Methods](#)