

What's the Catch?

Written by Nora Heston Tarte
Illustrations by Greg Brady

Chefs' Secrets for Preparing and Cooking Seafood at Home.

The pandemic has caused some unusual and sometimes even hard-to-explain trends. One of those is a surge in seafood sales at grocery stores across the nation. We can speculate what caused the increase — likely a combination of Americans cooking more meals at home and choosing fish when other meats were in short supply. But with seafood often being more delicate than meat, it can be difficult for the inexperienced to prepare at home. In these pages, local chefs spill their secrets on properly cleaning, preparing, and cooking a range of seafood to help you master the craft. One fact is certain: The product matters. From scallops to crabs, salmon to shrimp, fresh, high-quality seafood is the first step to creating a home-cooked masterpiece of the seafood variety.

HOW TO PREPARE SCALLOPS

Scott Lee, market manager at Reno's Sierra Gold Seafood and chef by trade, says there are many different preparation styles when it comes to cooking scallops, but the simplest method is to season and sear.

1. Start by purchasing dry-pack or diver scallops. Pat dry before searing. There is no need to wash them.



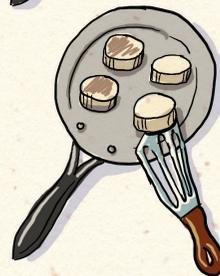
2. Season scallops with your favorite seasoning, such as lemon pepper, blackened seasoning, or freshly ground salt and pepper.



3. Heat a sauté pan with a touch of oil. Make sure the pan is hot before adding scallops.



4. Place scallops 1 to 2 inches apart so as not to crowd the pan. Sear scallops for 90 seconds, then flip. If your pan is hot enough, the scallops will not tear.



5. Flip scallops over and sear the other side for another 90 seconds. You should have a nice brown crust with a medium-rare center when they're done.



6. Remove scallops from pan, and pair with your favorite sauce or a fresh mango salsa.

HOW TO CLEAN A CRAB

A proper cleaning is an important first step to cooking crab. Lee says that in the off-season, crabs will come frozen, so it's important to thaw them first. Other than that, the process remains the same for fresh and frozen catches.



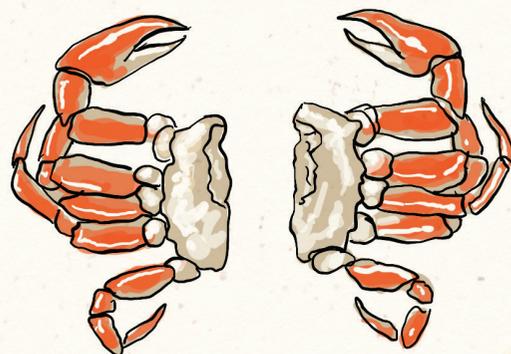
- 1.** Turn crab over and pop open the flap on its underside.



- 2.** Grasp legs on one side and pull off the top shell.



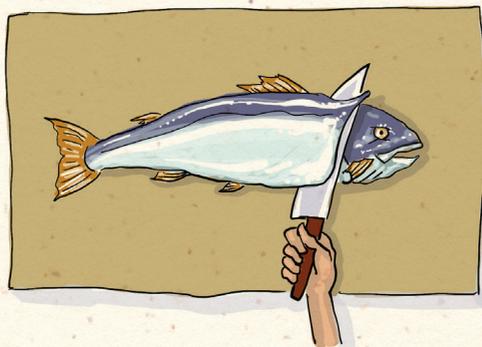
- 3.** Remove gills from the now-exposed insides as well as the yellow fat, or "mustard," and other entrails.



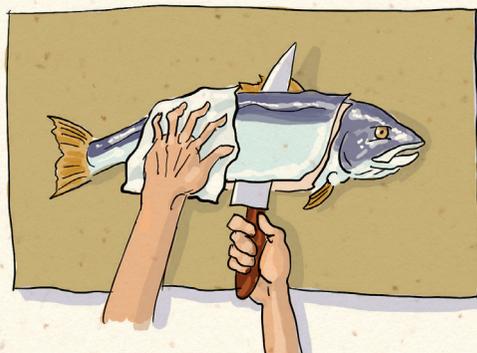
- 4.** Rinse both halves with cool water.

HOW TO FILET A FISH

David Holman, assistant executive chef at Reno's Atlantis Casino Resort Spa, says the tools you use are of the utmost importance when it comes to filleting a fish. You'll need a cutting board that can support the whole fish (16 to 24 inches) and a very sharp, 10- to 12-inch chef's knife. The faster the fish's journey from the water to your plate, the better, as the fish begins to deteriorate when it leaves the water.



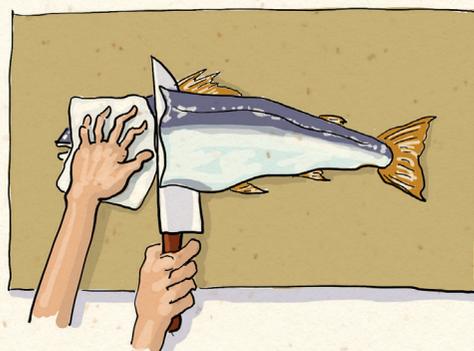
1. Put the head on the right-hand side of the cutting board, and cut from behind the gills to the backbone. Hold a towel in the left hand to help steady the fish.



2. Use smooth strokes, as if playing a violin, to remove the fillet from the backbone.



3. Dry the cutting board between steps to limit slippage and prevent cutting yourself. Transfer filets to a sheet pan as you work to keep cutting board clear for your workspace.



4. Flip fish over to remove backbone.

5. Dry cutting board again. Use a dry towel to hold the tail at a 45-degree angle and while pulling the tail gently with the left hand, use the knife to remove the skin, again with a smooth violin-playing motion.



HOW TO PREPARE AND COOK SHRIMP

Holman favors Santa Barbara spot prawns, Alaskan spot prawns, and Gulf prawns for cooking at home. If shrimp are frozen, he opts to defrost them in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days; running water over the shrimp can cause them to lose flavor.



1. Remove shells by using your thumb and index finger to pull the feet and twist the tail until the shell falls off.



2. Take a small paring knife and run it along the back of the shrimp, opposite the legs. Cut about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep and it will open up.



3. Under running water, wash shrimp, removing any black veins or spots. Be careful to remove vein that runs the entire length of the shrimp, with a slight tug.



4. Sauté shrimp in olive oil in a pan over medium-high heat, and sear on one side for 2 to 3 minutes until shrimp turns pink and is no longer opaque. This indicates that the shrimp is done. If you're following the timing method, it's hard to go wrong. Toast to golden brown, about 2 more minutes. If you boil the shrimp, it will start to curl and turn pink when it is cooked. When it's ready, the tail and head can almost touch each other.