

# 1 Sea & Freshwater Fish

## *Kinds of Fish and their Seasons*

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It will be sufficient for our purposes to divide fish into three main groups :—

1. Sea fish.
2. Freshwater fish.
3. Shell fish.

and, since the same methods of preparing, cooking and serving apply generally to all sea and freshwater fish, it will be simplest to discuss these two first and to leave shell fish for separate consideration later. This section of the book will therefore deal only with sea and freshwater fish. Of the three groups, sea fish is by far the most important as a source of food. It includes many different kinds of fish with a very wide range of natural characteristics. These offer much scope for differences in processing (smoking, salting, etc.) before they reach the consumer, and still greater scope afterwards in the kitchen.

In the following list, the most important and popular varieties of edible fish are arranged alphabetically under the main groups : (1) sea fish, (2) freshwater fish. The list also shows the season when each variety is in its best condition, though, of course, all kinds of sea fish can be eaten the whole year round.

### **Sea Fish**

Bream (sea)	June to November	Mackerel	April to November
Brill	All the year	Mullet, grey	August to April
Cod	September to May	Mullet, red	May to July
Coal Fish (Coley)	September to May	Plaice	May to January
Conger Eel	June to March	Skate	October to May
Flounder	January, to March	Smelt	September to March
Gurnet	July to March	Sole	March to January
Haddock (fresh)	May to January	Sprat	November to February
Hake	July to January	Turbot	March to December
Halibut	July to April	Whitebait	March to July
Herring	June to February	Whiting	December to March
John Dory	January to March	Witch Sole	August to March
Lemon Sole	December to April		

### **Freshwater Fish**

Freshwater fish must not be caught or sold from March 14th to June 16th except where there is a special bye-law. This allows the stock to be conserved during the breeding season. Freshwater fish are defined by regulation as "any fish living in fresh water, exclusive of salmon, trout and any kinds of fish which migrate to and from tidal waters."

The common varieties under the above definition are :—

Barbel	Eel	Pike
Bleak	Grayling	Rainbow Trout
Bream (freshwater)	Gudgeon	Roach
Carp	Loach	Rudd
Chub	Minnow	Tench
Dace	Perch	

*Fresh Salmon*—Home caught.

Where there is no special bye-law, the close season (*i.e.*, season when the fish must not be sold) is between August 31st and February 1st following.

*Fresh Salmon*—Imported.

No close season.

*Fresh Grilse* (young salmon).

Close season as for salmon. In its prime June and July.

*Fresh Trout* (including char, but excluding rainbow trout, which is listed under Freshwater Fish).

Home caught.

Where there is no special bye-law the close season for trout is between September 30th and March 1st following.

*Fresh Trout*—Imported.

No close season.

## *How to Select Fish*

Everybody who has been lucky enough to eat freshly caught fish knows the difference in flavour between this and the same kind of fish sometimes sold in shops far from the coast. Methods of keeping fish fresh during transit are now being improved. The housewife can do much to encourage improvements in fish distribution and marketing by choosing wisely and refusing to buy stale fish.

The following features are important to look for when choosing fish :—

1. Eyes should be bright and full, not dull and sunken.
2. Gills should be red.
3. There should be no disagreeable odour.
4. Flesh should be firm, not flabby. The tail should not droop.
5. When selecting steaks and fillets avoid any which look watery or fibrous.
6. When selecting flat fish, look at the dark side, for this shows staleness first. Thus the spots on a fresh plaice are brightly coloured, but as it grows stale they turn brownish and dull.
7. A fresh herring has bright silver scales and fins ; a fresh mackerel is even more brightly coloured. Both fish lose their bright colouring when stale.

*N.B.* For hints on buying shell fish see page 15.

All fresh fish should be cooked the day it is bought as it quickly loses freshness and flavour. Smoked fish such as kipper, bloaters, smoked haddock, etc., is only lightly smoked and it is unwise to keep it more than 24 hours without cooking. If fish is put in a refrigerator it should be placed inside a covered container to prevent the fish smell spreading to other foods.

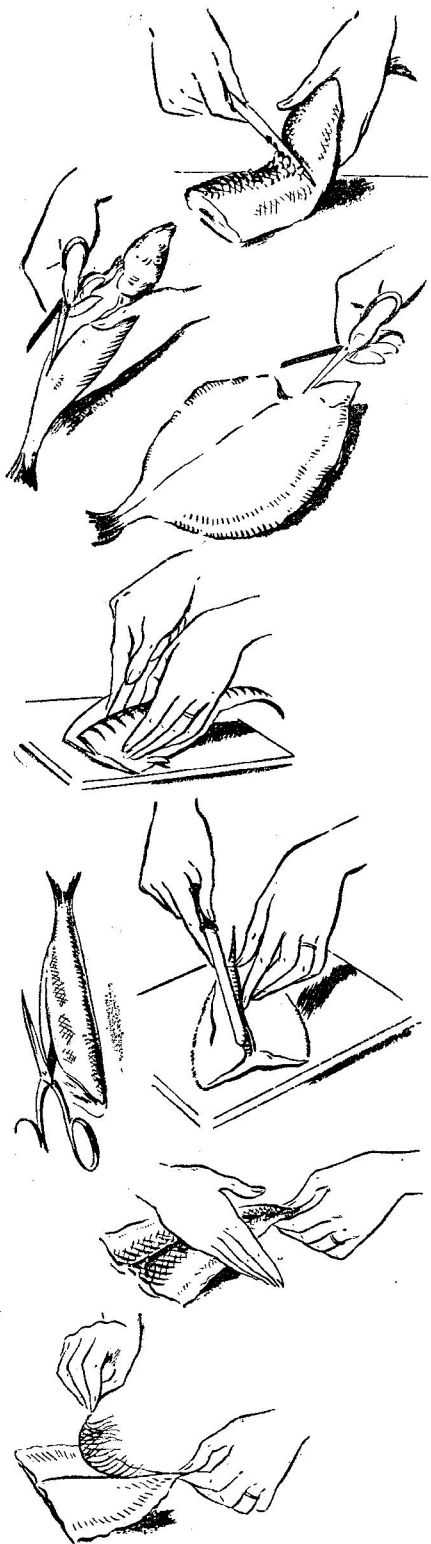
Some people regard fish as an expensive food, but it need not be so if full use is made of the cheaper kinds. Of all fish, the herring gives the best value for money. It can be bought fresh, salted, smoked, pickled or canned ; there is no end to the variety of dishes that can be made with it.

# The most suitable ways of Cooking different Fish

All fresh, round white fish, such as cod, haddock, hake, etc.	May be fried, baked, steamed, stewed, poached, boiled, or, if small, cut into suitable portions and grilled.
All fresh flat fish such as plaice, sole, flounder, dab, etc.	May be grilled, fried, baked, steamed or stewed.
Skate and ray	May be fried, baked, steamed or poached.
Eel	May be fried, stewed, jellied, boiled or baked in pies.
Smoked white fish	May be poached or boiled.
Dried or salt white fish	Should be soaked in cold water for 12 hours, then poached or boiled.
Canned fish	See page 23.
Herring, fresh	May be grilled, fried, baked, soured, boiled, poached or stewed.
kipper	May be grilled, fried, baked or poached.
bloater	May be grilled, fried, baked or poached.
salt	Should be soaked in cold water for 12 hours, changing the water occasionally, then boiled or poached, or the flesh may be cut in strips and used raw as hors d'œuvres in salads.
Mackerel, fresh	As fresh herring.
smoked	As kipper.
Pilchard, fresh	As fresh herring.
Sprat, fresh	Fried or grilled.
smoked	Fried or grilled or raw in hors d'œuvres.
Whitebait	Fried.
Salmon, fresh	Steamed, grilled, fried, baked or poached.
smoked	Very finely sliced in hors d'œuvres, salads and sandwiches.
Grilse	As fresh salmon.
Trout	Grilled, fried, baked or poached.
Whale meat	This can be prepared in the same way as beef steak, the best cuts can be fried or grilled, while the cheaper cuts should be made into curry, goulash or stewed slowly with onions and other vegetables.

Most kinds of freshwater fish, especially of the carp family, are improved, after careful cleaning, by being soaked for 2 or 3 hours in well-salted water to which vinegar has been added (2 table-spoons vinegar to 1 pint water). This helps to remove any muddy flavour they may have. Freshwater fish should not be boiled. It may be poached in fish stock (see page 17), stewed, baked or fried. Many kinds are greatly improved by a well-flavoured stuffing or a sharp sauce. For how to prepare and cook shell fish see page 15.

# How to Prepare Fish for Cooking



## **To Scale**

Use the back of a knife and, holding the fish by the tail, scrape firmly from the tail towards the head. Wash well to remove loose scales.

## **To Clean**

(a) Round fish such as herrings, whiting, mackerel, etc. Use a pair of kitchen scissors or a sharp knife and slit the belly from the head towards the vent. Remove all the entrails, keeping the roe. Wash well. If desired, remove the head by cutting across behind the gills.

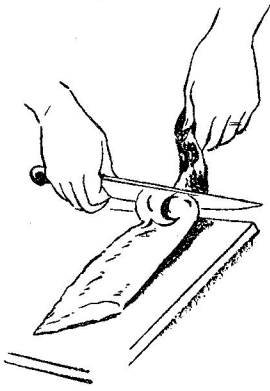
(b) Flat fish such as sole, flounder, dab, etc. The belly is just behind the head. Cut away the gills, open up the belly and clean out thoroughly. If the head is to be removed, do this with a semi-circular cut at the base of the head.

## **To Bone or Fillet**

(a) Round or flat fish. With a sharp knife slit the fish down the back bone and cut the flesh from the bones on each side. Use the bones and trimmings for fish stock or soup.

(b) Herring. Remove the heads and with a sharp knife or kitchen scissors, slit the belly of the fish down from the head end to the tail. Open the fish gently and place it on a board, inside down. Press hard along the back bone with the fingers to loosen the bone. Turn over, and starting at the head end, lift up the back bone and pull it steadily away from the flesh. Rinse the fish and place it on a sloping board to drain, or dry it on kitchen paper.

## To Skin Fillets



Many people prefer the skin to be removed from fillets before cooking. This is quite easy.

Place the fillets on a board, skin side down. Hold firmly by the tail end and with the aid of a knife, roll the flesh away from the skin, working from the tail to the head and taking care not to cut into the flesh. A little salt on the fingers of the left hand will prevent slipping.

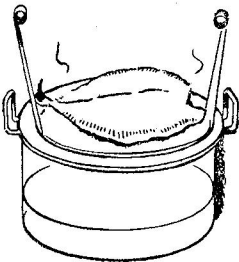
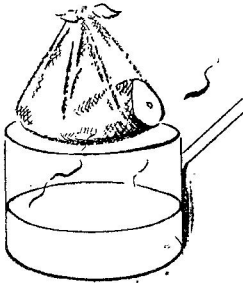
## General Directions for Cooking Fish

### How to tell when fish is fully cooked

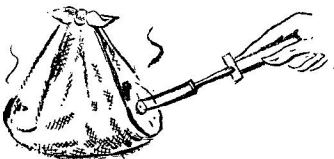
As oven cooking tends to make fish fall apart and be tough, dry and tasteless, it is important to be able to tell when it is fully cooked. Test it by pressing gently in the thickest part. If fully cooked, the flesh will easily leave the bones. Fillets are cooked when a creamy white substance begins to run out.

### How to boil fish

(Suitable for whole fish or cuts of a large fish such as cod, hake, skate, haddock, etc., but should not be used for skinned fish or for thin slices or cutlets).



1. Do not use more water than is needed just to cover the fish.
2. Bring the water to the boil and for each quart add 1 tablespoon vinegar, 2 level teaspoons salt and 3 peppercorns. For additional flavouring add a bouquet garni (a small sprig of thyme, a small bay leaf and 2 sprigs of parsley tied together with thick thread), 1 carrot and 1 onion. This will help to give a well-flavoured stock to use for a sauce to serve with the fish or for a fish soup.
3. Put the fish in the boiling water, cover the pan, immediately reducing the heat to below boiling point, and cook for the required time (see below). The fish is more easily handled if placed on a metal steaming rack before being put in the boiling water, or if tied loosely in clean muslin.
4. Test as described above. Drain very thoroughly and serve with one of the sauces given on pages 17-19, using some of the fish stock to make the sauce.



### Boiling Time-table

Thin fish : 7 minutes per pound plus 7 minutes.

Thick fish : 10 minutes per pound plus 10 minutes.

For example, a thin fish weighing 2 lb. needs 7 multiplied by 2 minutes with another 7 minutes added, or 21 minutes in all.

## ***How to Steam Fish***

Small fillets or thin slices.

1. Place the fish on a well-greased soup plate. Sprinkle with salt, and if liked, with a little milk.
2. Place the soup plate over a pan of boiling water or cooking potatoes and cover with the saucepan lid or an inverted plate. Steam for 10–15 minutes.
3. Serve with the fish liquid poured over or with one of the sauces given on pages 17–19, using the fish liquor to make the sauce.

Larger cuts.

1. Place the fish in a steamer and sprinkle with salt.
2. Keep the water below boiling all the time the fish is cooking. Times as for boiling (see page 9).
3. Test at the thickest part. The flesh should easily leave the bones.

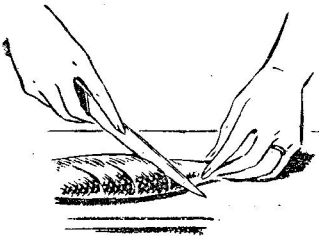
## ***How to Poach Fish***

Suitable for smoked fish and small whole fish, such as haddock, herring, whiting.

1. Half-fill a frying pan or shallow saucepan with water, adding salt and vinegar as for boiling.
2. Bring the water to the boil, then add the fish and reduce the heat.
3. Cook gently for the required time (see page 9).
4. Test, drain thoroughly, and serve with melted margarine or butter or one of the sauces given on pages 17–19.

## ***How to Grill Fish***

Suitable for steaks or fillets and for small whole fish such as sole, plaice, dab, herring.



1. Heat the grill and grease the grid or grill rack.
2. Small whole fish should be cut across in deep gashes to allow the heat to penetrate, otherwise the outside of the fish will dry up before the inside is cooked. Season the fish well with salt and pepper. Cutlets and white fish should be basted with a little melted fat during grilling, but oily fish such as herring does not need any extra fat.
3. Grill the fish on both sides until done according to test described on page 9. The time varies from 5 to 20 minutes, depending on the size.
4. Serve at once with a suitable sauce (see page 17). Garnish with watercress.

## ***How to Fry Fish***

Suitable for fillets, steaks and small whole fish such as herring, sprat, whiting, dab, sole. Shallow or deep frying pan may be used. Shallow frying is better for thick slices or steaks, which require longer cooking for the heat to penetrate thoroughly, and also for herring and mackerel. Fish is improved by being coated before frying. The coating forms a crust on the outside and prevents fat from soaking through.

## How to Coat Fish

Below are five useful ways of coating fish. Whichever is used, the fish should first be thoroughly dried to make the coating stick well.



1. Dip the fish in milk or beaten egg and then in seasoned flour (1 level teaspoon salt and a pinch of pepper to each ounce of flour). It is important to have the fish evenly coated with the egg or milk. A pastry brush will be found useful for this.

2. Coat the fish evenly with beaten egg and then dip it in fine breadcrumbs and pat well to make the crumbs stick. Use fine crumbs because coarse ones fall off during frying and make the fat dirty. White crumbs give a better finish than browned crumbs.

Shake before frying, to remove any loose crumbs.

3. To coat in thin batter and crumbs. Ingredients required are :—

2 oz. flour	Water to mix (approx. $\frac{1}{4}$ pint)
Salt and pepper	Browned breadcrumbs

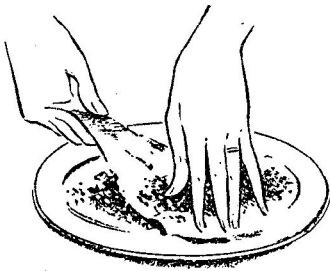
Mix the flour and seasoning together and use enough water to mix to the consistency of thin cream. Dip the fish in the batter and then in the crumbs. Pat the crumbs well on to the fish.

4. To coat in thick batter. Ingredients required are :—

4 oz. flour	1 egg, fresh or reconstituted
Salt and pepper	Milk or water to mix (approx. 5 tablespoons)

Mix together the flour and seasoning. Add the egg and just enough milk or water to mix to a stiff batter that will coat the back of a spoon thickly. Dip the fish in this batter and make sure it is evenly coated. If fish is first dipped in flour it helps to make the batter stick.

5. To coat herring—roll in fine or medium oatmeal seasoned with salt and pepper.



## How to Fry in Shallow Fat

Use clean fat, free from moisture as water in fat makes it splutter badly. Heat enough fat to cover the bottom of the pan or come halfway up the food. Heat until a faint blue smoke rises. Fry the coated fish until golden brown on one side, turn carefully and brown the other side. If the fish is very thick and requires some time to cook through, lower the heat after it has browned and continue cooking until tender. The time varies from 5 to 20 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fish. When cooked, drain on absorbent paper and serve with a sauce (see pages 17-19).

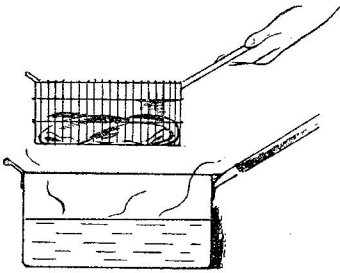
## How to Fry Herring, Pilchards and Sprats without Fat

This method is only possible with a very thick frying pan. Sprinkle the pan with salt and heat it, shaking it occasionally until very hot. Place the fish in the pan and fry until brown and crisp on both sides. Serve hot.

## How to Fry in Deep Fat

1. Use a deep heavy pan and sufficient fat to cover the food, but not to come more than halfway up the pan. This is essential because, when food is added to hot fat, some of the surface moisture

will boil violently in the fat and may cause it to boil over if the pan is too shallow. Many pans sold for deep fat frying are too wide and shallow to be satisfactory. An ordinary saucepan is quite good provided it is of thick metal.



2. A frying basket or a perforated spoon or ladle is needed to lift the fish out of the hot fat. Heat the frying basket in the fat, but do not use it to lower the fish into the fat because the coating of the uncooked fish, when placed directly on the hot wires of the basket, will stick to them.

3. Use one of the fats suitable for frying, such as lard, dripping, cooking fat or oil. It should be clean and free from moisture.

4. Heat the fat gently. When it stops bubbling and a very faint blue smoke rises, it is hot enough to use. If the fat smokes it is burning and will spoil the food.

The temperature of the fat may be tested by dropping in a 1-in. cube of stale bread. If the fat is hot enough this should brown in 1 minute.

If a candy or fat thermometer is available the following are the correct temperatures to use :—

Croquettes and fish cakes	350° F.	Cooking time	3-4 minutes.
Fish fillets	370° F.	„ „	4-6 „
Small whole fish	370° F.	„ „	3-5 „

5. Do not try to fry too much fish at once as this reduces the temperature of the fat and the fish will be pale and greasy instead of well browned and crisp.

6. As soon as it is cooked, drain on absorbent paper. Serve very hot with one of the sauces given on pages 17-19. A salad is very good with fried fish as the fresh vegetables counteract any greasiness.

7. Strain the fat through a fine sieve or muslin and keep for further use.

## How to Oven-Fry Fish (without fat)

Suitable for fillets and steaks.

Rub each piece of fish with a little salt and pepper, then coat with one of the following coatings :—

1. Egg and browned breadcrumb
2. Milk and browned breadcrumbs.
3. Milk and oatmeal.

Put into a well greased piedish, cover with greased paper and bake in a hot oven or about half an hour. Serve hot with one of the sauces on pages 17-19.

## How to Bake Fish

Method A (Stuffed)

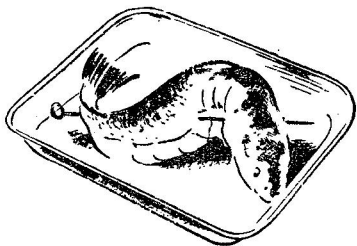


Suitable for whole round white fish or a middle cut from a large fish.

1. Scale and clean the fish. If a whole fish such as haddock or whiting is used, leave the head and tail on.

2. Stuff the belly with a savoury forcemeat (see page 17) and sew up with a needle and coarse thread. Do not fill the fish too tightly or it will burst during cooking because the stuffing swells as it cooks. A whole fish may then be skewered into a letter S.





3. Place the fish in a baking tin with a very little fat and cover with a piece of greased paper. Bake in a moderately hot oven until tender. Test as described on page 9. For a fish weighing up to 4 lb. allow 10 minutes per lb. and 5 minutes for each additional pound. Small whole fish such as herring need 10–15 minutes.

4. To serve, remove the skewer and thread and garnish with slices of lemon and parsley. Serve with one of the sauces on pages 17–19.

*Method B (Without Stuffing).* Suitable for whole fish, middle cut from a large fish, steaks or fillets.

1. Season well with salt and pepper.

2. The fish can be sprinkled with a mixture of breadcrumbs and grated cheese and this is particularly good with steaks and fillets. A large piece of fish can have several gashes cut in the top and these can be filled with pieces of tomato.

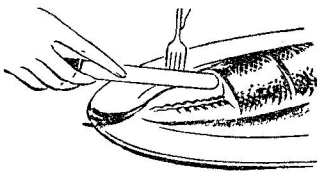
3. Put in a baking tin with a little fat and cook in a moderately hot oven,  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour for big pieces, 10–15 minutes for small pieces.

## How to Stew Fish

Suitable for steaks, fillets and small pieces of cod.

1. Place the fish in a saucepan or casserole and nearly cover with fish stock (see page 17), milk or water. Season well.

2. Cover the pan or casserole and cook very gently, either in the oven or on top of the stove. It should not be allowed to boil. For times see “How to Boil Fish” (page 9).



## Cooked Fish

### How to carve a whole cooked fish

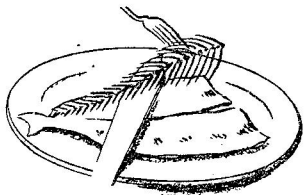
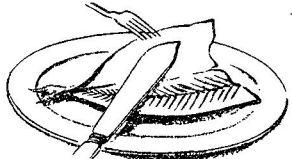
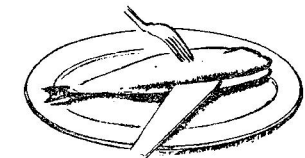
Use a fish knife and fork or a tablespoon and fork. Work along the backbone of the fish, lifting the flesh off one side and then the other. In this way the flesh can be served free from bones.

### How to bone a cooked herring or small whole fish

1. Slit down the centre of the back from head to tail, inserting the knife just far enough to touch the backbone.

2. Gently lay back the flesh of the uppermost side, thus revealing the backbone with the smaller bones attached to it.

3. Now insert the knife under the backbone and lift it out gently. It should come clean away.



# *What to serve with Fish*

All fresh fish has a delicate flavour which should not only be preserved by correct and careful cookery, but should be matched with suitable sauces and accompaniments.

When fish forms part of a main meal, potatoes and other vegetables, preferably fresh green vegetables, are required to provide other necessary nutriments. For this purpose there is a wide range of choice. Almost any root or green vegetables that happen to be in season can suitably accompany fish. The possible exceptions (though this is largely a matter of individual taste) are some of the rather strongly flavoured vegetables such as artichokes, turnips, parsnips, sprouts or spinach. Since fish does not usually make a very colourful dish, it is made more attractive in appearance and consequently more digestible by being served with highly coloured vegetables such as fresh greens and tomatoes, or any salad.

The following are some suggestions to act as a guide.

## ***What to serve with boiled or steamed fish***

Boiled, mashed or jacket potatoes. Any cooked green vegetable or grilled tomatoes or a mixed green salad, or a salad made of one vegetable such as watercress, tomato or cucumber.

Any of the following sauces would be suitable (for recipes see pages 17-19). Parsley, caper, fennel, lemon, tomato, cheese, egg, anchovy or chutney.

## ***What to serve with baked fish***

Baked or boiled potatoes and cooked cabbage or green peas or broad beans or a green salad or baked tomatoes. Any of the following sauces would be suitable (for recipes see pages 17-19): Tomato, brown, anchovy, mustard, sharp, parsley, caper or lemon.

## ***What to serve with fried fish***

Fried, sauté or boiled potatoes. Also fried or grilled tomatoes, green peas or broad beans, carrots, beetroot or a green salad. Any of the following sauces would be suitable (for recipes see pages 17-19). Sharp, tomato, mustard, caper or lemon. In addition serve slices of lemon (when available) and chutney. Either pickled red cabbage or pickled beetroot is a good accompaniment.

## ***What to serve with grilled fish***

Fried, sauté or boiled potatoes. Also grilled tomatoes, or green peas, broad beans or cooked cabbage, carrots or a salad. Any of the sauces served with fried fish would be suitable. In addition serve with slices of cut lemon (when available).  
For the serving of shell fish (see page 16).

# *How to use Fish in other Ways*

## ***Cooked Fish***

Use in salads, sandwich fillings and, combined with sauces, in fish cakes, kedgeree and pies.

As with all cooked foods, care should be taken to season well and to see that the fish is warmed through without being overheated or twice cooked.

## ***Canned Fish***

Canned fish may be substituted in any recipe which calls for cooked fish as an ingredient. There are also many other ways of using canned fish. Recipes will be found on pages 23, 27 and 29. If stored in a cool dry place, canned fish will keep for 5 years. It is advisable to inspect the cans occasionally to make sure none is "blown" or rusted. "Blown" cans must be discarded, and rusted cans should be used as quickly as possible because the rust will eventually eat through the tin.

Fish in oil, such as sardines, should be turned over occasionally to keep the oil well mixed with the fish and so prevent the top layer from drying.

Open cans of fish will not keep longer than cooked fresh fish.