

Catfish; it's what's for dinner

When considering "What's for dinner?," consider an East Texas favorite – catfish. Because catfish is economical as well as nutritious, it serves as a perfect dish for all to enjoy.

Nutritionally, catfish is low in calories, fat, and sodium, high in protein and a good source of several vitamins and minerals. In addition to tasting good and being a healthy food choice, high quality catfish does not have an objectionable odor and can easily be substituted in recipes calling for trout, flounder, or any other white, non-oily fish.

Economically, fish and seafood generally cost more per pound than red meats, but since there is little to no bone or fat to trim away, there is less shrinkage during cooking resulting in less waste. Traditional rules-of-thumb regarding fish is to measure the fish fillet or steak at its thickest part and cook 10 minutes per inch, double cooking time if fish is frozen, add five minutes to cooking time if fish is being cooked in foil or in a sauce, and microwave fish in a covered container three minutes per pound.

In regard to storage, fresh catfish can be refrigerated 1-2 days before use and frozen up to three months for best quality. An important factor to keep in mind is that the quality of frozen seafood is directly related to the quality of the product before it was frozen. Freezing only maintains the quality of the product, but never increases the quality.

Although, fish and shell fish are approximately 75 percent water, they will not freeze at 32 degrees F, due to various other substances such as salts, fats, and proteins located in tissue cells. These substances lower the freezing temperatures of fish to about 25 degrees F. with complete freezing occurring at 20 degrees F.

Listed are two catfish dishes to enjoy.

Extension programs serve people of all ages regardless of socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, religion, disability or national origin.



LIZ BUCKNER
Extension Agent

Classic Fried Catfish

3/4 cup yellow cornmeal
1/4 cup flour
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
4 catfish fillets (or whole)
Vegetable oil

Combine cornmeal, flour, salt, cayenne pepper, and garlic powder. Coat catfish with mixture, shaking off excess. Fill deep pot or 12-inch skillet half full with vegetable oil. Heat to 350 degrees F. Add catfish in single layer and fry until golden brown, about 5 to 6 minutes, depending on size. Remove and drain on paper towel. Makes 4 servings.

VARIATION: FOR CRISPY CLASSIC FRIED CATFISH, combine 1/3 cup sour cream, 1/3 cup Dijon mustard and 3 tablespoons water in a separate shallow dish. (Prepare cornmeal mixture as above, omitting salt.) Dip catfish in sour cream mixture, then in cornmeal mixture. Follow frying procedures as above. For lighter, cuisine, pan fry in tablespoon vegetable oil in a non-stick pan or oven fry at 450 degrees F., drizzling catfish with 1 tablespoon vegetable oil.

Blackened Catfish

Recipe Ingredients:

6-8 - catfish fillets, thinly sliced
1 - teaspoon crushed dried thyme leaves
1 - teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 - teaspoon black pepper
1 - teaspoon salt
1/2 - teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 - teaspoon onion powder
1/2 - teaspoon paprika
1/2 - cup butter, melted
lemon juice

Cookware and Utensils:

1 - cast iron skillet or large heavy skillet
1 - mixing bowl
1 - spatula

Recipe Instructions:

Rinse catfish fillets under running cold water and then thoroughly pat dry with paper towels.

Make your seasoning mixture by combining crushed dried thyme leaves, cayenne pepper, black pepper, salt, garlic powder, onion powder and paprika in a small bowl.

Brush melted butter lightly over catfish fillets and sprinkle with blackened seasoning mix. Repeat for other side. Be sure to completely coat each fillet.

Heat iron cast skillet until it is very hot, about 10 minutes. Pour the leftover butter into your skillet. Carefully place the catfish fillets into the skillet and cook for about 4 minutes on both sides. This blackened seasoning mixture will produce some smoke so another way to tell when to turn over you fillets is when the smoke turns gray.

Serve finished fillets over a bed of white steamed rice. Add lemon juice to the top of each fillet. Good side dishes to compliment the catfish are a Caesar or Garden salad with baked potato.