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# PREPARING FISH & WILD GAME

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Exceptional Recipes for the Finest of Wild Game Feasts



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# Introduction



In the 19th century, wild foods made up a significant portion of the average person's diet—not by choice, but by necessity. As times changed and the world became smaller, railroad cars and, later, jetliners, made it easy to transport fresh meat and fish (as well as fruits, vegetables and other perishable goods) across the country; refrigeration and modern food preservation techniques made it possible to serve seasonal specialties all year round.

As modern times advanced, an increasingly urbanized society lost touch with many of the seasonal rhythms that drove our fore-bears. Yet each spring, anglers still take to the swollen streams and lakes in search of fish, and in the fall, hunters pursue a wide variety of wild game in places ranging from the local woodlot to the wilds of the Arctic.

Fishing and hunting provide more than food for the table; they also provide nourishment for the spirit, a release from the cares of the day and a connection to the traditions of the past. We have developed to a point where hunting and fishing are no longer a necessity; they are a choice, but one that satisfies both body and soul.

This book is designed to help you make the most of your wild harvest. All aspects of fish and game care and preparation are covered. It begins with a comprehensive section on basic cooking techniques—useful to novice and seasoned cooks alike—and then goes on to present a stunning collection of recipes for fish and game. Helpful tips and sidebars guide the cook through variations and other recipe ideas. The book concludes with the most comprehensive guide to fish and game field care, butchering and final processing ever published in a single volume.

We are confident that *Preparing Fish & Wild Game* will become the most useful outdoor-related cookbook on your shelf.



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# Cooking Techniques

*for  
Fish & Wild Game*



**T**his section of *Preparing Fish & Wild Game* provides all the information you'll need to cook your wild harvest with confidence. Whether you're frying up a mess of panfish, grilling elk steaks or cooking up a hearty fish or game gumbo, you'll find the basic cooking instructions here.

The chapter starts on the stove top, where you'll learn the proper techniques for panfrying, stir-frying, blackening, poaching and steaming. There are even recipes and

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techniques explaining how to get the most out of your fish or game by making savory stock from the bones and trimmings.

Tabletop appliances are covered next. You'll learn how to deep-fry fish and game in a deep fryer, mini-fryer or electric skillet. Batter recipes and cooking suggestions make it easy to get perfect results. The section finishes with step-by-step instructions for cooking small game in a pressure cooker and includes a useful chart of cooking times.

Oven-cooking techniques range from baking and roasting to oven-frying to broiling. Fish and game are discussed separately for each of these useful methods.

Many cooks think of the microwave only for defrosting, but it's an excellent choice for cooking fish to keep it moist and tasty. Charts and photos explain how to bake and poach fish in the microwave.

Grilling is a natural for wild game, but it's also a great way to cook fish. Techniques for fish and game are covered, including how to grill foil-wrapped foods and how to keep fish from falling apart on the grill.

Smoking adds a wonderful flavor to fish and game and can be used to make jerky and other semipreserved foods. This section of the book takes the mystery out of this ancient technique and explains how to use cold smoke to flavor foods as well as how to smoke-cook foods at higher temperatures.

Sausage making can seem daunting to the inexperienced cook, but the step-by-step instructions and photos in the next section of this chapter make it easy. Both synthetic and natural casings are covered, so you can tackle any sausage-making chores with confidence.

Finally, you'll learn how to preserve fish and game by canning them in a standard stove-top pressure cooker.





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## *Panfrying*

### FISH & GAME

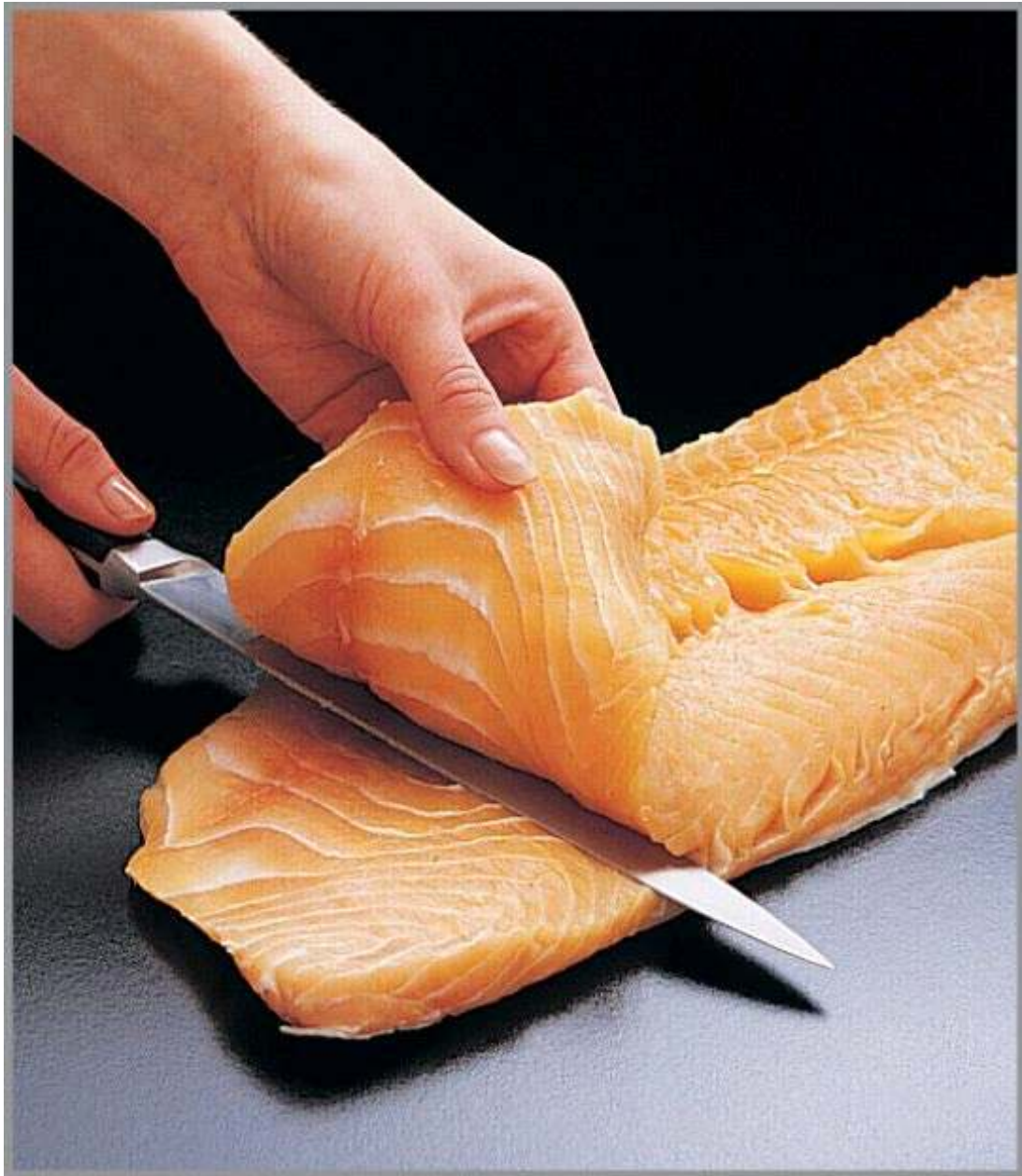
**P**anfrying works well for lean fish and many types of game. The high cooking temperature (up to 375°F) seals in the juices, producing moist and tender results. Cooking times are generally quick; fish cooks in 5 to 10 minutes, while cut-up game birds or small game may take up to 15 minutes.

Fish with a low to moderate oil content are a good choice for frying; oily fish are too rich. The exception is small stream trout, which have less fat than larger ones; these are excellent panfried. Small fish of all types can be cooked whole. Remove the head and tail before cooking, if desired; small trout are usually fried with the head and tail intact.

Whole fish such as crappies, sunnies and perch must also be skinned or scaled before frying. Bullheads, small catfish and trout need only a good wipe with a paper towel before breading to remove any moisture, fish slime or loose scales. Larger fish must be filleted before frying; fillets thicker than 1 1/2 inches should be sliced into thinner pieces (right). Arrange fish in a skillet with the thickest portions to the center.







Tender cuts of boneless venison, as well as game birds and small game, are excellent when panfried. Boneless game bird pieces cook more evenly and quickly than bone-in pieces and are easier to eat; however, it's hard to beat the appeal of a plate of chicken-fried rabbit or pheasant prepared with cut-up bone-in pieces.

Dredge foods to be fried in flour, cornmeal, cracker crumbs, cornflake crumbs or a seasoned coating mix. With heavier coatings

such as cracker crumbs, the fish or game should be dredged in flour and dipped in beaten eggs before being coated with crumbs. This double coating helps prevent the breading from falling off during frying.

Use a large, heavy skillet to distribute the heat evenly. With most skillets, 1/8 to 1/4

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inch of oil is sufficient; nonstick skillets require even less. Arrange floured pieces in the skillet evenly, without overlapping. If you overload the skillet, the oil will cool off, resulting in soggy food. If you cook more than one batch of food, you may need to add additional oil between batches.

Panfry over medium heat, leaving the skillet uncovered. Drain the cooked pieces on paper towels. Serve immediately, or keep warm in a 175°F oven while frying additional pieces or making a pan sauce.

## *Coating with Crumbs*



1 Dip chilled fish or game in cold milk, cold buttermilk or a mixture of 1 beaten egg and 1 to 2 tablespoons cold milk or water. Egg helps to make the coating stick.





2 Coat dipped fish or game with flour, pancake mix, Potato Buds®, biscuit mix, cornmeal or fine bread, cracker or cornflake crumbs (right).

## How to Panfry



1 Coat the bottom of a heavy skillet with  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of vegetable oil. Heat over medium heat until a single drop of water added to the skillet sizzles and evaporates. If the skillet starts smoking, reduce heat and allow to cool before adding food.





2 Arrange coated fish or game in the hot skillet in a single layer. Fry over medium heat, turning several times, until cooked through and golden. (Fish cooks more quickly than game and is usually turned only once.)





3 Drain the cooked fish or game on a paper towel-lined plate. Serve immediately, or keep warm in a 175°F oven while frying additional pieces or making a pan sauce.



4 Pour off excess oil before making a pan sauce or gravy. Add sauce or gravy liquid to degreased skillet and stir to loosen browned bits. Proceed as directed in individual recipe.



## *How to Tell If Fish Is Done*



UNDERDONE fish is transparent and watery. The flesh does not flake easily with a fork.



JUST-RIGHT fish is opaque and moist. The layers flake easily when tested with a fork.





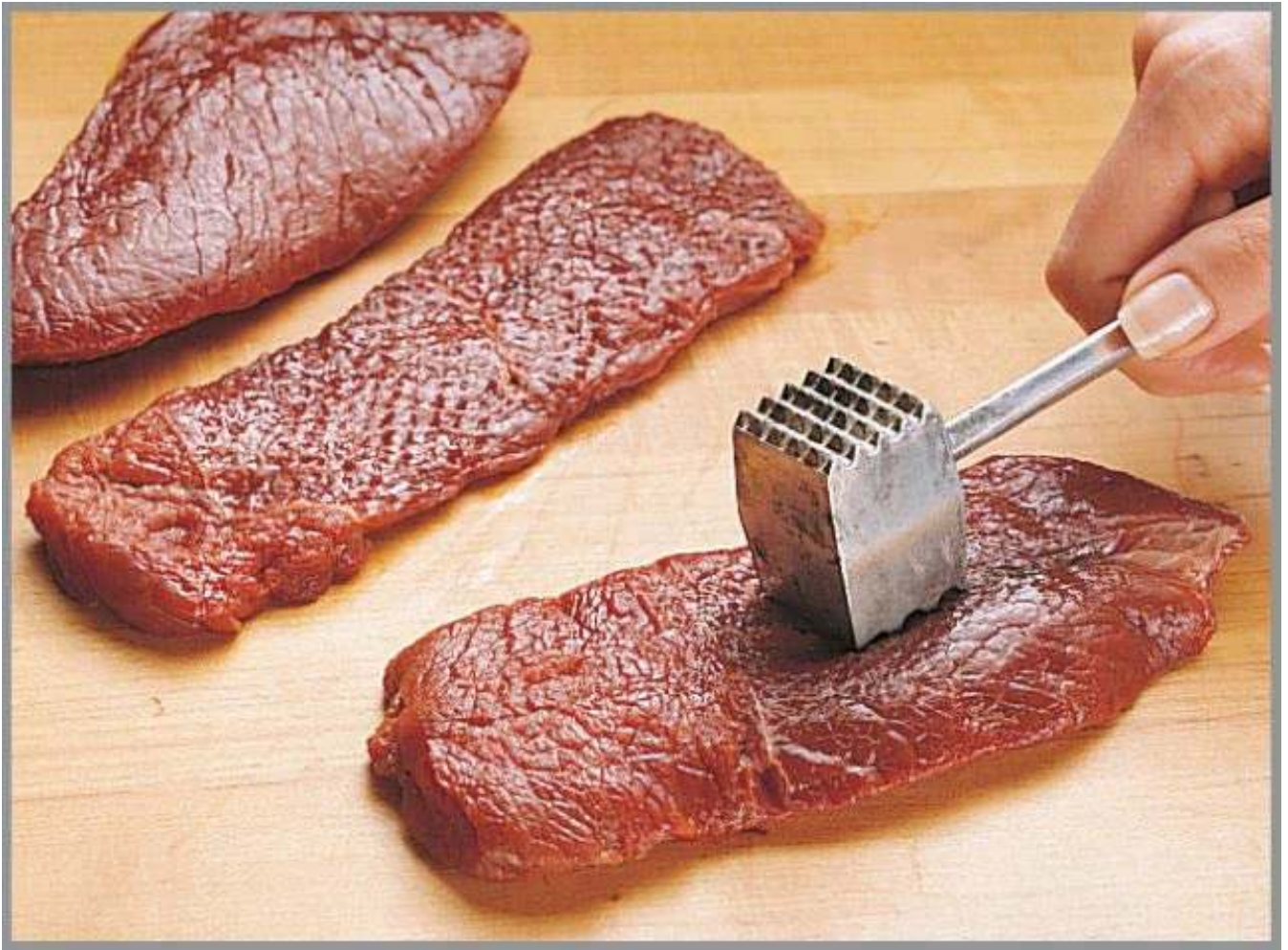
OVERDONE fish is dry and hard when tested with a fork. The flesh has little taste.

## *Panfrying Tips for Game*

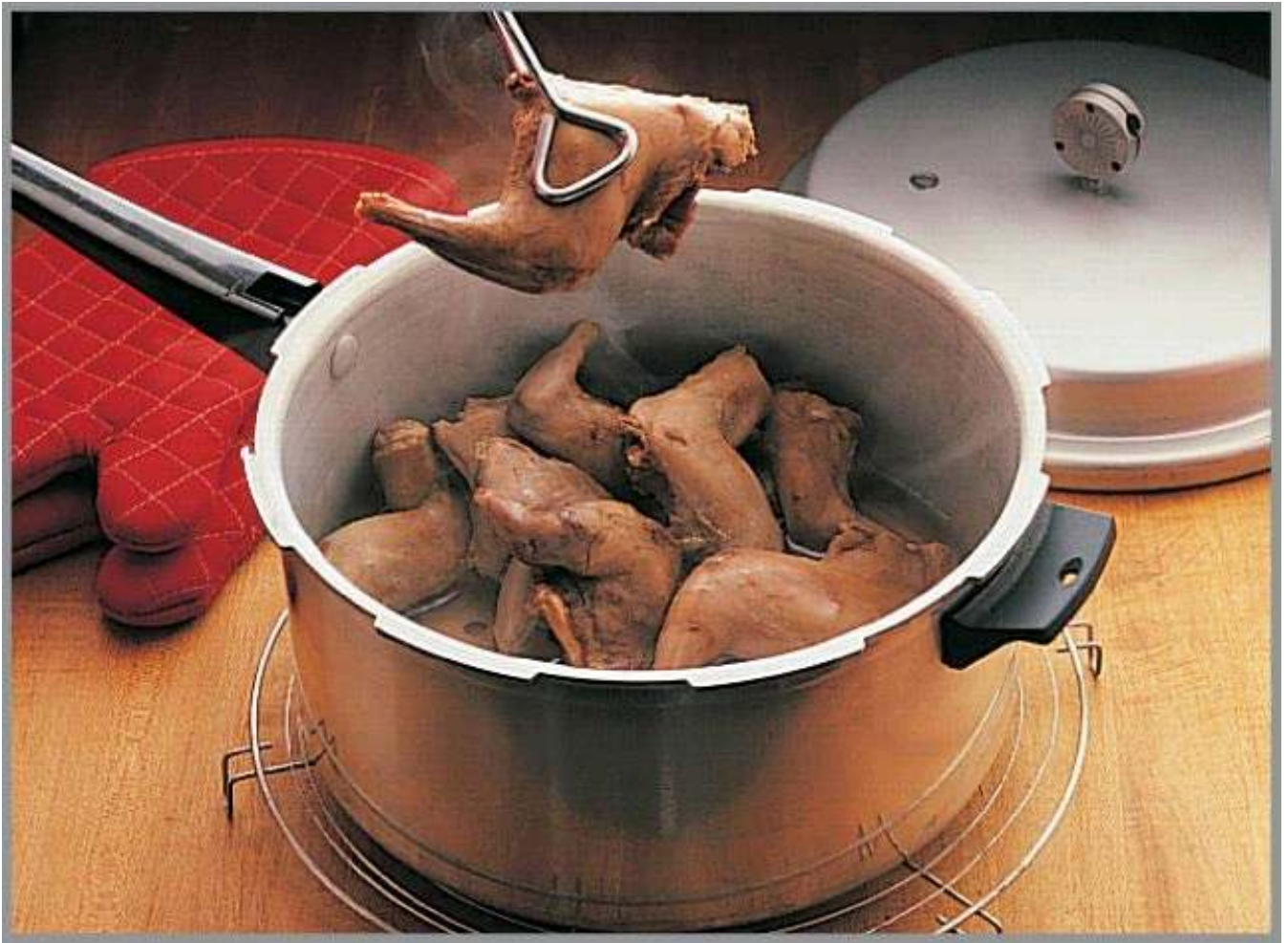


SPLIT small birds like quail or dove down the back, then open up and flatten before panfrying. This ensures even cooking.





**POUND** boneless venison steaks to an even thickness before panfrying. Pounding also helps tenderize the meat.



PRESSURE-COOK older squirrels, rabbits or raccoons before breading and panfrying. This tenderizes tough game.

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## *Panfrying Chart for Fish*

<b>TYPE</b>	<b>SIZE</b>	<b>COOKING TIME 1ST SIDE</b>	<b>COOKING TIME 2ND SIDE</b>
WHOLE	UP TO 1 1/2 INCHES THICK	3 TO 5 MINUTES	2 TO 5 MINUTES
FILLETS	1/4 INCH THICK	3 MINUTES	1 TO 2 MINUTES
	1/2 INCH THICK	3 MINUTES	1 1/2 TO 3 MINUTES
	3/4 INCH THICK	5 MINUTES	1 1/2 TO 3 1/2 MINUTES
	1 INCH THICK	5 MINUTES	2 TO 4 MINUTES

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# *Stir-Frying*

## FISH & GAME

**W**ith this traditional Asian method, bite-sized pieces of fish or game are cooked over high heat in a wok or large skillet with a mixture of vegetables in a sauce. Hot vegetable or peanut oil is usually flavored with seasonings such as fresh gingerroot, garlic or chili peppers before the other ingredients are added.

Have all ingredients, including any sauce mixture, prepared and ready to cook before heating the wok or skillet. Because the food is cooked over high heat, it must be stirred constantly to prevent burning. Stir-frying happens very quickly, and the finished dish should be served immediately. Rice or any other dishes to be served with the stir-fry should be prepared in advance and kept hot while the main dish is being stir-fried.



Always use firm-textured fish, so the stirring doesn't break up the pieces. Because it cooks so quickly, fish is often added after any vegetables have already been cooked. Stir as gently as possible to avoid breaking up the fish.

Boneless game works best for stir-frying. Cut the game into chunks or strips as directed in the specific recipe. Cubes are generally  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch in size, while strips are usually  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick. These sizes promote rapid cooking. Because meat may take longer to cook than onions or other vegetables, it is usually cooked first; often, the cooked meat is transferred to a dish and kept warm while the vegetables are cooked in the wok. The meat is then returned to the wok for rewarming when the sauce is added.



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