

FACT SHEET: Fish preparation techniques

Skinning fillets

Lay the fillet skin side down on a board, with the tail towards you. Hold the tail end firmly. Keeping the knife at an angle of 45° or less, use a slight sawing action to free the fillet. Fold the flesh forwards as you go and keep the skin taut. (A pinch of salt on the fingers may help you to grip the skin more firmly.)



Removing pin bones from fillets

These are found just behind the gill fins in round fish. Feel with your fingers to establish the position of the pin bones. Make a cut at a slight angle on each side of the line of bones. Remove the small V-shaped piece of flesh together with the bones.



Filleting Round Fish

Lay the fish on a board with the back away from you and the head pointing to the left. Lift the gill fin and cut at an angle behind the fin to the top of the head. Hold the fish firmly against the board. Insert the knife at the head end and keeping the knife almost flat cut along the top of the back of the fish to the tail.



About half way down the fish, near the end of the belly cavity, push the knife blade through and over the backbone. Cut towards the tail keeping the knife as flat to the bone as possible. Lift this part of the fillet up and, using long sweeping strokes and keeping the knife blade almost flat, cut the top half of the fillet free from the rib cage.



Turn the fish over with the head pointing to the right. Insert the knife at the tail end and make a long cut along the top back of the fish towards the head. Lift the gill fin and make an angled cut around the head. Repeat the process as before finishing by cutting the fillet free from the rib cage.



Filleting flat fish

Lay the fish on a board with the head pointing away from you. Cut around the head and down the centre or lateral line of the fish right through to the backbone.



Working on the fillet nearest to you, insert the point of the knife under the flesh at the head end. Keeping the knife blade parallel to the bones, slice away the fillet using long sweeping strokes. Remove the other fillet in the same way but turn the fish round so that the tail is pointing away from you and cut from tail to head.



Repeat the whole process on the other side to obtain the remaining two fillets - giving you four quarter-cut fillets. Sometimes only one fillet is taken from each side and these are called cross-cut fillets.



Boning herring and mackerel

Cut off the fins with a pair of scissors and remove the head by cutting just behind the gills. Slit the fish along the belly and remove the insides with kitchen paper. (At certain times of the year the fish may have roe [egg sacs] inside which may be cooked and eaten too.)



Open the belly out and “stand” on a board, skin side up. Press down firmly with the fingers along the centre back of the fish.



Turn the fish over and ease the backbone away from the flesh. Cut off at the tail. Remove any small, loose bones. Rinse the fish using cold water and dry on kitchen paper.

