

Chef Millers' Tip - **Halibut**

Great news -- halibut is in the prime of its season. As those who know me well can attest, I love to pair this succulent fish with two of its seasonal counterparts, asparagus and wild mushrooms, which are starting to arrive on the scene. This fish is so versatile, though, that you can enjoy it in a variety of ways. Try an Asian-inspired version by poaching it in a soy broth with ginger, garlic, and scallions, or a classic French preparation with *beurre blanc* and a reduction of shallots and white wine. It's also a great candidate for fish and chips.

The key to successfully preparing this fish is simple: do not overcook it. If you do, it will taste and feel like cotton. As you cook it, keep in mind that the heat will continue to affect the fish after you remove it from the pan, so always take it from the pan just a fraction of a second before it's done. How do you know when to do this? The flesh will be opaque, and when you insert a toothpick in the center, there will be no resistance at all. Also, I have found that cooking it over high heat reduces the risk that the meat will become dry.

Halibut can be poached, grilled, pan fried, broiled, or baked. If you grill it, remember it is particularly low in fat and could dry out quickly, so baste it with butter or oil. I prefer Alaskan halibut as the steaks are thicker than Atlantic halibut. If you have a particularly thick steak, season it about 2 minutes before putting it on the fire. It will quickly absorb the salt, rendering an even more refined flavor.

Did You Know...

The name halibut is derived from the Dutch word *heilbot*. Halibut live in both the North Pacific and the North Atlantic oceans and are highly regarded food fish. They are the largest of all flat fish, as well as one of the sea's largest species. Although Pacific halibut can grow to more than eight feet long and 700 pounds (rightfully earning their Latin name, *Hippoglossus*, or "hippos of the sea"), most commercially caught fish run 20 to 100 pounds.

Quality halibut is easy to recognize. It smells fresh, like the ocean, and has firm white flesh. Stay away from steaks with a dull appearance and whole fish with scale loss and ragged fins. Yellow spotting on frozen halibut is a sign of potential rancidity. Keep fresh halibut cool on the trip from the market to your house, and refrigerate it as soon as possible. To store it, remove and discard the packaging, rinse the fish under cold water, and pat it dry with paper towels. Don't let it sit in its juices or it will deteriorate quickly -- place it on a rack in a shallow pan filled with crushed ice. Cover with cling wrap or foil and set in the coldest part of the refrigerator, where it will stay acceptably fresh for up to two days.

Coming Soon...**Maryland Soft Shell Crabs.**