

## **How to Select the Best Fish When Cooking At Home**

When shopping for and selecting fish, there are certain key things to keep in mind. And, George Baxevanis, owner of Fisherman's Quarters II, a busy family seafood restaurant, located in Asheville, NC, is certainly qualified to offer some tips.

George was born in Greece and is a third-generation fisherman turned restaurateur. Having grown up in the pristine beauty of the Greek Isles, George knows about all types of seafood firsthand.

"First, the freshest fish is caught and consumed that day," explains George. "However, many of us live in parts of the country where that is just not possible. That's why it is good to know what to look for when buying fish to ensure its freshness."

It's also important to know your local fish monger at your fish store or supermarket. Find out when they receive their fish. It's as simple as asking the clerk behind the counter. Then, you'll be able to plan your trip to buy fish. For instance, if fresh shipments come in on Tuesday, that's the day to go in.

### **What to Look for in Whole Fish**

1. When choosing your fish, look for clear eyes and bright colors. The skin or flesh of the fish should be shiny. If there are spots or signs of bruising, the fish is not fresh; ask for another one. As a fish gets old, the skin will appear dull and lack color.
2. Next is the "sniff test." The store clerk should allow you to smell the fish before you buy. The fish should have a clean and briny smell. Any powerful odor is a tell tale sign that the fish is past its prime. Again, don't buy it if it has any "fishy" odor. It should smell like the ocean – clean and somewhat salty.
3. Now, if you are purchasing a whole fish, make sure to check the gills. The gills should also be bright in color. A rich full red color is what to look for. Any dark red or dull color indicates that the fish is also old, so don't be fooled. If the gills are dull, the flesh will be too.

### **What to Look for in Fillets**

1. Just like the whole fish, look for fish that is fresh bright and shiny. If skin and flesh looks a little metallic, this is a good sign that it is very fresh. Just like purchasing whole fish, you may want to sniff it. Remember, no strong odors. Sweet, briny and fresh fragrances are what your nose should encounter.
2. There should be little to no liquid on the flesh. If a milky-like liquid is present, don't buy it. Fillets must be rinsed and patted dry in order to keep from spoiling. Never buy fish

that is swimming in its own juices. Most fish stores use drip pans to keep this from happening.

3. Finally, ask to have the fillets placed on the counter so you can press your finger against the flesh. It should be firm and you should be able to leave a fingerprint.

So, there you have it. Buying fresh fish is really not a hard task. You may even want to purchase a cookbook with pictures of different species of fish. This will help you to better know what to look for as far as color goes. Again, let your nose be your guide. This will be your strongest tool in purchasing good fresh fish!