

Asheville, North Carolina Seafood Restaurants Love Their Flounder

While you may wonder what a town in the mountains of western North Carolina loves about flounder, just ask George Baxevanis, owner of Fisherman's Quarters II, an Asheville seafood restaurant and see what he has to say.

"It's mild, flaky, versatile and delicious," says Baxevanis. "Flounder is one of favorite fish and it is making a huge comeback on the seafood scene. More and more consumers are going for the flounder for a number of reasons; it's delicious, affordable and is a fish low on the methyl-mercury scale.

Flounder: What is it?

Besides a mainstay in Asheville seafood restaurants, flounder is one section of a large group of basically unrelated fishes known as "flatfish." Others in the group include: flukes, soles and halibuts. Flounders are ocean dwelling and are found in coastal waters, lagoons and estuaries of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. There are five main classifications. In the U.S., we have summer, southern and winter flounders. In the Pacific, particularly Asia, you'll find Olive flounders; in European waters the European flounder. The Olive flounder of Asia is also called Bastard Halibut because of its similarity to the fish.

What Does it Look Like?

Flounders are one species of a very large and loose group called flatfishes. This means that they are flattened laterally and swim sideways on the bottom where they can hide in the mud. Because of this adaptation, the eyes of flounders, and other flatfish, migrate to one side of the body making for a very unusual looking animal. From species to species flounder can be right or left eyed. Flounder are usually brown or dark grayish in color with some form of spotting on the "top" side and milky white on the "bottom." Flounder also have some color changing ability which is a great help with camouflage.

Why Do Asheville Seafood Restaurants Love It So?

"Because it's delicious!" says Baxevanis. "It's mild, flaky and excellent for a wide variety of preparations." And, because of its texture and flavor, flounder is versatile. It can be baked, fried, broiled or sauteed and goes well with any accompaniments. And now, with seafood lovers getting wise to methyl-mercury, flounder is a great choice for those wishing to eat seafood more than once a week. According to the EPA's guidelines for how much mercury to expect in any one species, flounder is ranked very low. Using the site, GotMercury.org, a person of about 160 pounds size can eat up to 48 ounces of flounder a week. That's eight portions, a far cry more than the recommended one to two portions for fish such as tuna, snapper and grouper.

How Do You Catch a Flounder?

Flounder can be a tricky species to catch, especially for the uninitiated. Flounders are a species with a picky appetite. They love shellfish, worms, smaller fish, crabs and shrimp-alive. It's rare to catch a flounder on artificial bait. There are three main ways to catch flounder: using a drag net along the bottom; line caught on a flounder rig; or gigging. As a kid at my grandma's house, we would use seine nets to catch whatever we could, often pulling in shrimp, crabs and flounder. On a line it is important to use what is known as a flounder rig. This leaves the bait freely floating in the current and gives the fish no hint that it is about to be reeled in until you set the hook. The flounder swims up, eyes the bait,

takes a big bite and swims away. When you feel the line playing out, set the hook and prepare for a little bit of a fight. No matter how you catch your flounder – at the beach, the supermarket or the seafood restaurant – it's sure to be a treat for you and your family.