

HERE ARE

STORIES *from* CHILDHOOD

SMART METHODS *for*
HARVESTING AND COOKING SEAFOOD

& DELECTABLE RECIPES

from Oregon's "salty chef." John Nelson grew up near Astoria and split his time among the docks, his mamma's chowder shack, and his family's dairy farm. While his native son's perspective of the Pacific Northwest is shared by many, the perspective is uniquely his.

Let the fish tales begin.

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NELSON



DIG, SHUCK, SHAKE



DIG *a clam*
SHUCK *an oyster*
SHAKE *a crab*



FISH and SEAFOOD RECIPES
from the PACIFIC NORTHWEST

JOHN NELSON



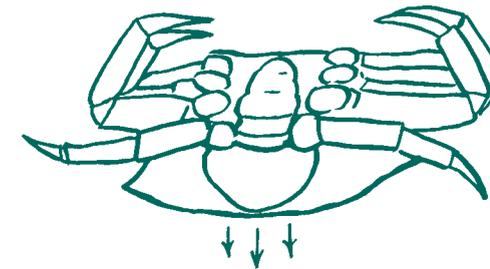
CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	7
METHOD TO THE MADNESS	
How to Find, Prep & Eat Pacific Northwest Seafood	10
DEEP SEA FISH	
Salmon, Tuna, Fish & Chips, Fish Cakes	30
OCEAN CRUSTACEANS	
Crab & Shrimp.....	58
COASTAL FISH	
Sole & Rockfish.....	70
ROCKY COAST & BEACH SEAFOOD	
Clams, Mussels, Sea Urchin.....	80
BAY & ESTUARY SHELLFISH	
Oysters, Bay Clams, Chowder.....	86
RIVER & STREAM FISH & FRIENDS	
Trout, Smelt, Sturgeon, Crawdads, & Squid.....	96
STARTERS, SMALL PLATES & SIDES	
Appetizers, Soups, Salads & Veggies.....	106
SAUCES & SPICES	
Condiments, Mustards & Finishing Touches	116
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	122
<i>Index</i>	123
<i>About the Author</i>	128

HOW TO SHAKE A CRAB

Where I'm from, it is all about shaking a crab, using no utensils, only your hands, to extract the succulent meat. Let me teach you how so you can eat twice as much as your friends!

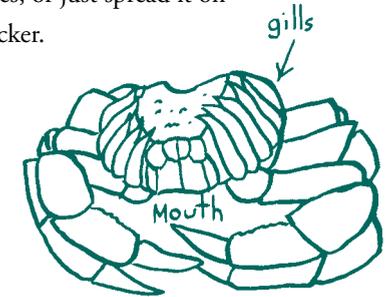
One of my passions is to pass on the art of cooking “Northwest” through television and cooking classes. My favorite lesson has to be showing someone how to “shake” a Dungeness crab. And my favorite comment at the end of my shaking crab class is, “You mean after all these years of struggling to get the meat out, it’s this easy and I could have been eating so much more?” Let’s be honest: it’s no fun picking and picking at the inside of a crab leg or the body and coming out with little shreds of meat. You want chunks—whole, rich, sweet pieces of crab to dip into your butter or put on top of your Louie salad. So grab a crab, lay out the newspaper or hang out by the sink, and let’s get to it!



- ◆ With the abdomen up and the back of the crab toward you, pull down the very back of the shell with your thumb. We do this upside down so the

all the goodies don’t fall from the inside of the shell, like the butter and nectar, which can be used in another recipe if you want.

- ◆ Now that you have removed the shell, flip the crab upright and feel at the front of the crab just behind the mouth a hole to put your thumb in. With your thumb, pull down and remove the mouth of the crab. Right now, stop! If you find a red meaty blanket covering the interior of the body, this is the new shell growing and a real delicacy. Dip it in butter and enjoy it, or sauté with butter and garlic and a little white wine. Also, take a look for the creamy butterscotch-looking butter of the crab to save for other recipes, or just spread it on a cracker.

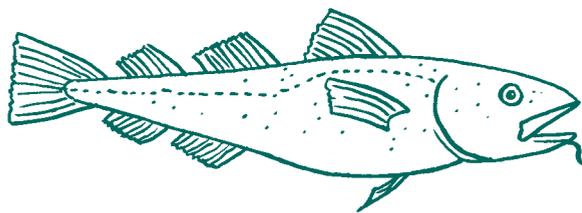


- ◆ At this point remove the gills on each side of the crab’s body. Grasp both sides of the crab, holding both the legs and the body and snap the crab in half, removing the carrot-shaped abdomen from the bottom of the crab. The body meat is now exposed and ready to be washed gently with cold water. There you have it; you should have two clean halves of crab now ready to shake.

FISH AND CHIPS NORTHWEST STYLE

A great fish and chips is the same as a great bowl of clam chowder for me—a taste sensation that dances on my tongue, reminding me of the salt sea air and childhood events that shaped my spiritual essence. Okay, you may be thinking at this point that I might have a bit too much sand behind (or between) my ears, but fish and chips is an art, and when it's made with fresh Northwest fish, it's "skookum!" ("awesome," in Chinook slang).

It's like most anything, if you have not seen, felt, or tasted something in its true and proper form, you won't know what you've been missing. Case in point, I can't begin to tell you how many of my restaurant guests tell me they think that fish is "fishy," or oysters are "gross," and how many have allowed me to indulge their senses by preparing the food they think they don't like properly, and giving them a taste. I love to watch as "aha!" moments light up their faces and they are converted to seafood lovers. It's the same with fish and chips. Once you know what a delight this classic can truly be, an "aha!" moment might just creep up on you too.



THE FISH

I have a secret to confess. I grew so tired of using halibut for fish and chips that one of my sous chefs suggested to me, "Why don't you write this on the daily special menu—'Halibut Fish and Chips Made with Fresh Cod—Trust Me.'" You know what? It worked. Everyone ordered the fish and chips because it said halibut, and everyone also thought the fish that day was the most moist, flavorful, tender accompaniment to their chips! My point here is, halibut is phenomenal as a fresh fish, but it is not the best fish in a deep-fried application such as fish and chips.

Unfortunately, we have all been brainwashed to believe that because halibut is considered the cream of the crop, it should make the best fried fish too. But halibut is a very unforgiving fish: it easily overcooks, and subjecting it to the high heat of the deep fryer is one of the worst places for it. Please save your beautiful, fresh halibut for other cooking methods, and let's focus on fresh or frozen cod for fish and chips. Cod pulls through the freezing process much better than halibut because of its higher oil content. The cod's oil content also helps the cod maintain its integrity in the deep fryer, making a much more flavorful and tender finished product. In other words, cod is much more forgiving. This is why I recommend true cod, lingcod, rockfish or any fish in the rock family to make a superior fried fish.

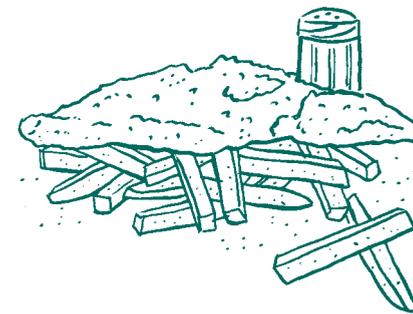
JOHN NELSON'S FISH & CHIPS BATTER

Serves 4

2 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon baking powder
Pinch of salt
1–12 ounces beer (play with different types of beer to find your favorite flavor)

THE COATING:

2 cups rice flour
Pinch of salt
1/4 teaspoon white pepper
1/4 teaspoon granulated onion
1/4 teaspoon granulated garlic
Canola or peanut oil for frying
2 pounds cod, cut into 3-inch portions



Let's be honest: to tell you everything I know about batters would require another book. So I'll just give you my personal favorite batter recipe. For a crisp, non-greasy fried fish on the outside, and a pure and tender inside, it's all about the coating. You'll see what I mean in the recipe that follows. Of course, this is my personal bias, but I really don't like an oily fish with my chips, do you?

There are many ways to create a light and crisp batter: soda water for lightness, baking powder for leavening and crispness, for example. But let's make it easy by whipping up a quick beer batter and making a crisp coating using seasoned rice flour, thus removing the worry of winding up with greasy fish.

Sift the flour, baking powder, and salt together in a mixing bowl. Mix in the beer with a wire whisk until smooth. Keep the batter in the refrigerator until ready to use.

Blend all coating ingredients together. Put the coating mix in a pie plate or other low dish.

Heat the frying oil to 375°F in a heavy-bottomed pot. Use enough oil to fill the pot only halfway, to guard against splash-over.

Dip fish in batter, scraping off excess batter against the side of the bowl to leave a light coating on the fish. Immediately dredge the battered fish in the coating mixture. Slowly place the fish in the hot oil and cook until it becomes a light golden brown.

Meanwhile, place a cooling rack on top of paper towels. Carefully remove the cooked fish from the hot oil with a slotted spoon. Place the fried fish on the rack to drain off excess oil. This method helps maintain a crispier end product versus putting the fish directly on a paper towel, which retains too much moisture and can lead to fish with soggy bottoms.

ROCKY COAST & BEACH SEAFOOD

Clams,
Mussels,
Sea Urchin



BAD CLAM KARMA

"You boys been digging a little too much?"

"No sir," I said to the warden, as the sound of crunching shells came from my hip boots with every step. I had dug just a few too many razor clams and stuffed the excess in my boots in hopes of making it to my truck 100 yards away without getting caught. I know you're thinking waste, waste, waste. If I were skinnier, I would give that to you, but let's just say the clams did not go unused.

"Let's have a look at what you got," the warden said, peering into our nets. As I gave him my clam bag, I could feel the extra clams in my boots starting to become chowder between my toes, and the broken shells were slashing my shins. The warden spread the clams out on the hard sand, admiring the size and condition. "You boys digging commercially?" Of course I had forgotten my commercial fishing license at home, but my buddy had his and spoke up. "Yes, we are!" "Okay then," said the warden. "See you around next time," and he strolled down the sun-soaked beach.

After gathering our clams back up, I was too paranoid to empty my boots, so we began the walk back to the truck. It must have been Clam Killer Karma, because on the way to our wheel we came across two bikini-clad blonds digging in the sand. As I tried to slip by them unnoticed, with hip boots full of clam fritters, the two girls bounced toward us and asked how we got the clams, because all they found were a bunch of holes.

Why now? Why not when I was playing football on the beach, or having a bonfire—why was this opportunity to meet the girls of my adolescent dreams happening while I was doshing in clam goo? Bad Clam Karma, that's why. Well, my buddy and I made the best of the situation, and were all too eager to give pointers and then stand back to watch as they attacked sand shrimp holes that they arrogantly thought were razor clam holes. "You're doing a great job, girls." "Gee, I can't imagine why they're getting away so fast. Keep digging, you'll find them," we said. Leaning on my clam shovel, I stood with legs stiff as driftwood, trying not to move and give away the secret in my hip boots. I thought, "I hope there's no such thing as Bad Bikini Karma!"

ROCKY COAST & BEACH SEAFOOD 81

OYSTERS BONFIRE BAKED WITH BACON & CHARRED ONION

Serves 2

12 fresh oysters in the shell
6 strips good-quality thick-cut bacon

1 onion, sliced into rings
Splash of white wine for each oyster and yourself

There is something about smoked bacon and oysters that just works. It's one of the things like tartar sauce that will never go out of style. Usually, baked oysters are done on the half shell in the oven or broiler. But I am assuming you are sitting by a bonfire on the beach, so we will do this a little differently.

Nestle the oysters around the hot coals of the fire. Using a hand-made BBQ stick or a store-bought metal one, thread the slices of bacon onto the stick and roast over the flame just like a marshmallow until fully cooked but not crispy. Do the same with the onion and cook until they take on a char and become caramelized.

Watch the oysters, if the liquor begins to bubble from the shell, pull immediately. You don't want the nectar to escape. Pull all the oysters from the coals and carefully pry the oysters open from the lip side using an oyster knife and a towel; they will be hot. Pry open only far enough to expose the oyster; do not take it off. With the shell slightly open, look up some of the bacon and onion and place in the shell with a splash of the wine. Close the shell and set it back alongside the coals for just a couple more minutes.

When done, carefully remove the top shell and enjoy.



80 BAY AND ESTUARY SHELLFISH

NORTHWEST CLAM FRITTERS

Serves 2

2 tablespoons minced onion
2 teaspoons minced garlic
Butter or oil for sautéing
1 large egg
2 teaspoons lemon juice
Pinch of salt and white pepper
1 1/2 pounds finely chopped clam meat
1/4 cup ground soda crackers
1/4 teaspoon baking powder

Simplicity is its best. Mom used a hand-crank grinder for the perfect ground clams for these flavorful patties of ocean goodness.

Sauté onions and garlic in butter or oil over medium heat until translucent. Remove and place in a mixing bowl. To this, add the egg, lemon juice, and salt and pepper and mix well. Add the clams and stir well. Add the soda crackers and baking powder and combine thoroughly.

Dip your hands in water, then hand-scoop about 2 tablespoons of clam mixture and pat it into a three-quarter-inch patty. Repeat until the batter is all used. Fry each side in butter over moderate heat until golden brown.

Serve with my favorite tartar sauce (see page 300).



BAY AND ESTUARY SHELLFISH 81

TEA-CURED BLACK COD

Serves 3

4 bags of dark black tea
4 cups water
3/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup salt
1/4 teaspoon allspice
1/4 teaspoon cardamom
1 fillet of black cod, pin bones removed

Using tea as a marinade, of course, draws from the Asian influences I've experienced over my life on the docks and among the commercial fishermen. Plenty of great Asian dishes were made and eaten around shared tables with people who fished for a living.

Boil tea bags in the 4 cups of water until very strong and black. Remove from heat and add sugar, salt, allspice, and cardamom. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Refrigerate tea once until completely cool.

Using a nonreactive pan or ziplock bag, pour tea cure over cod and place in refrigerator for a minimum of 4 hours, overnight is best. Once cured, remove and pat the fish dry. The cod is now ready to broil, barbecue or pan fry.



FISH TERRINE

Serves 4

Fish cake mix, doubled (see page 30)
2 cups crawfish tail meat or small prawns (31–35 per pound)
1 tablespoon pickled beer juice
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
8 asparagus spears, blanched

I remember growing up in the Lutheran Church with all the Swedes, and, of course, doing the church basement suppers. They were great so the Pacific Northwest coast—everyone brought shrimp or crab off the boat or black cod or salmon something. I remember some awful spicy-type dishes, and I think this fish terrine is my antidote to those unpleasant concoctions.

This dish takes the fish cake recipe in another direction and turns it into a terrine, which is another word for a pâté—a well-seasoned ground meat or fish dish.

Line the bottom of a 4 X 9-inch loaf pan with parchment paper. Spray the bottom and sides with cooking spray.

Split the fish cake mix equally. Into one half, add the beer juice and mix well. Into the other half, add the chopped dill and mix well.

For the first layer, evenly spread the crawfish meat or shrimp on top of the parchment paper. For the second layer, evenly spread the fish cake mix with dill. On top of this layer, place the asparagus lengthwise, with a little space between spears. Now cover the asparagus with the fish cake mix colored with beer juice, spreading evenly on top.

Preheat the oven to 300°F. Bake the terrine uncovered for about 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

The fish terrine may be served hot, cold, or at room temperature.



An Appetizer Terrine

For a lighter terrine, take another loaf pan of the same size and fill it with something heavy, like a couple of soup cans, and place it on top of the finished terrine and put the whole thing in the refrigerator overnight. Once chilled, unroll the terrine by running hot water around the outside bottom of the loaf pan, and inverting it onto a cutting board and tapping it. Serve the fish terrine with hardback crackers, mustard and marinated cucumbers.

DEEP SEA FISH 83

SALMON CHICHARRONES

Serves 4

Skin from the side of one raw salmon
3 tablespoons kosher or sea salt
1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
About 3 cups peanut or canola oil

A chicharrón is a deep-fried pork rind treat that you can find in Latin American markets. Deep-frying makes a lot of things taste great. So don't ever throw away raw salmon skin, make salmon chicharrones! I like putting mine on my salad with crab butter vinaigrette—delicious! They're salty, crispy, and a little fatty, but it's a rich fish flavor that's surprisingly neither fatty nor greasy.

My main gig in the kitchen at Branded Ranch is from Seaside, Oregon—my neck of the woods. When I interviewed here, I told him I'd give him a fry for a week. The first day, he took some salmon skin and made deep-fried "salmon rinds." I couldn't believe it. I said, "How'd you know that's the best part of the salmon? Nobody does that around here but me." I thought, This is the guy for me. That was his job interview, basically. Make salmon chicharrones for me, and you're hired!

Lay out the salmon skin scale-side down, and with a knife, remove any extra fat or meat. Sprinkle salt and pepper evenly on both sides of the skin and let it stand on a rack for 10 to 15 minutes. Cut into thin strips. In a large, heavy pot, add oil to make about an inch, and heat it to 325°F.

While the oil is heating, brush off any extra salt and pepper, and cut the salmon skin crosswise into 1 1/2-inch-wide strips. Gently place about 12 strips of skin in the hot oil and deep-fry them until all bubbles stop coming from the skin. Remove skin from the oil and place it on paper towels to drain. Once cooled, the skin will be crispy and delicious. Eat it like popcorn or pork rinds, or scatter it on a salad.



44 DEEP SEA FISH

SALMON WITH SMOKED BACON, WILD MUSHROOMS & BREAD CRUMBS

Serves 4

One side of salmon, skin on (about 1 1/2 to 2 pounds)
3 cups day-old hearty bread (whole grain, French or sourdough)
1 pound wild mushrooms, like chanterelles
1/4 cup chopped fresh chives
2 tablespoons chopped fresh dill
3 anchovy fillets
Kosher or sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/2 cup olive oil
1/2 pound smoked crop bacon

This combination of flavors is like taking in all the tastes and smells of the Northwest at once, from salmon on the docks, to fresh bread baking in a wood burning stove on a rainy day, to the smell of the damp forest that the mushroom call home.

I developed this recipe after travels to Mexico. I went out fishing with the small commercial fishermen in their party boats and often came back with little halibut. The hotel owner would bake them for me for dinner. She'd grind up bones, chives, and bread crumbs, add capers and garlic, then datter it all over the fish and bake it. Delicious! That was my inspiration for this recipe using Northwest mushrooms.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease a sheet pan with olive oil or spray it with cooking spray.

Place the salmon skin-side down on the sheet pan.

Put the bread, mushrooms, chives, dill, anchovies, and salt and pepper to taste into a food processor; blend until chunky. Add the olive oil and bacon and blend a little more, until the bacon turns to small crumbles and the olive oil has bound everything together.

Spread this mixture on top of the salmon and bake it for about 12–15 minutes, or until the fillet feels just firm to the touch.

82 DEEP SEA FISH

DEEP SEA FISH 45