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Fried fish: Achieving the seafood lover's holy grail

If you love fish and care about how it's cooked, you're probably "mildly obsessive" about achieving a perfectly crisp exterior, said Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Nick Fisher in *The River Cottage Fish Book*. There are few gastronomic sensations more pleasing than biting through a fillet's crispy skin "to find tender, delicate, lightly steaming fish flesh within."

You can attain that holy grail when simply frying fish in a shallow pan, or when shallow-frying after first dusting the fish in flour or batter. But some of us can't resist heating up some oil for deep-frying and attempting to "reproduce the chip-shop effect at home." Beer is a key ingredient in the batter; it adds lightness and flavor. Get the consistency right and the batter will work for deep-frying almost any fish or shellfish, including calamari or scallops.

One tool we highly recommend for every chef who deep-fries on a stovetop: "a built-in sense of self-preservation." Choose a wide, heavy saucpan that's at least 8 inches high, and never fill it more than a third of the way with oil.

Recipe of the week

Fish in beer batter

1½ cups all-purpose flour



A good batter preserves the fish's tenderness.

Peanut or sunflower oil—enough for deep-frying, plus 2 tbsp
About 1 cup good beer (anything, really, including stout, but preferably not cheap lager)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Mixed fish of your choice

Sift flour into a bowl, or put unsifted flour in a bowl and whisk to remove lumps. Add 2 tbsp of peanut oil, then gradually whisk in beer, stopping when

you have a batter with the consistency of high-emulsion paint. Beat well to get rid of any lumps, season generously, and let rest 30 minutes or so.

Place a deep, heavy-bottomed pan on stove. Fill no more than a third of the way with oil, and heat until it reaches 320 degrees, or until a cube of bread dropped in turns golden brown in 1½ to 2 minutes.

Dip fish in batter so it is thoroughly immersed, then hold over bowl for a few seconds so any excess batter drips back. Lower the battered fish into hot oil. Fry one piece at a time if large pieces, so as not to crowd pan. Fry large pieces of fish for 4 to 5 minutes, until golden brown and crisp. (Smaller items, such as squid rings, need just 2 minutes or so.) Scoop fish out with a wire skimmer and transfer to a warm dish lined with paper towels. Keep warm while you fry remaining fish, then serve right away, with ketchup or perhaps some tartar sauce. Serves 4 to 6.

A note on the used oil: Frying oil usually can be used multiple times before it's discarded. Just use a coffee filter to strain it before putting it away. The next time you need it, taste-test it by heating a tablespoon and frying a cube of bread in it.

L.A. barbecue: Smokers worthy of Texas

There was a time when talk of barbecue in Los Angeles meant a two-day road trip to Texas, said Jenn Garber in *LA Weekly*. But today there are enough local places making "fantastically blackened" slabs of meat that L.A. easily holds its own in national competitions. The spots recommended below are not "cliffed barbecue joints." They're "old-school-inspired smokers"—places you could take a Texan visitor without apology.

Bludso's BBQ. Beef is king at this modest storefront, where Texas transplant Kevin Bludso subjects ribs and brisket to a "shameless amount of smoke" before they emerge with blackened edges and "meaty-to-the-bone" flavor. The sauces and sides are "pretty great" as well, but you might not need them. 811 S. Long Beach Blvd., Compton, (310) 637-1342

Bigmista's Barbecue Pit master Nell Strawder got his start on the BBQ competition circuit, working a hybrid angle—"a little Texan, a little North Carolina." He's never opened a retail location, but his "burnt ends" and "pig candy"—sugared caramelized bacon—can now be found at area farmers markets from Long Beach to El Segundo. bigmista.com

Phillips Barbecue "Expect a long wait" at any of the three Phillips locations. The franchise's takeout windows and peppery pork ribs have attracted lines for more than 20 years, and their hot barbecue sauce is "pretty hard to beat if you can hang with the heat." 4307 Leimert Blvd., (323) 292-7613, plus two other area locations



Bigmista's market stand

Muscadet: Getting serious?

Muscadet may be graduating from "bargain white" to "the next big thing," said Elin McCoy in *Bloomberg.com*. For some 15 years, the wine's producers in France's Loire Valley have been working to overcome Muscadet's reputation as merely "a gulpable, fresh, crisp white wine ideally paired with oysters." The result has been a bounty of impressive wines that bring out the best of the area's most distinctive vineyards.

2007 Excelsior (\$28). The melon de Bourgogne grapes in this "dense and round" wine come from 75-year-old vines near the ocean. It's "full of finesse," with "a briny edge."

2009 Granite de Clisson (\$25).

This powerful Muscadet is "rich and complex." It pairs very well with cheese.

1999 Le 1' d'Or (\$28). Time has given this wine "weight and softness," creating "aromas of honey and a complex, tangy ginger-and-lemon taste."

