

Just for the “Halibut!”

With another month of Spring dining ahead, in this post I explore a large and delicious flatfish, indigenous to both Atlantic and Pacific waters.

That fish, the halibut, begins its life in a round body with eyes on each side of its head, typical of a finfish. However, when the halibut reaches six months of age, it transitions to its life as a flatfish, residing on the ocean floor, and with both eyes shifting to the top of its flat body.

Halibut comes into season in the Spring, with the best eating quality arriving in late Spring to early Summer, specifically in the months of May through July.

Atlantic halibut, which is the largest flatfish species in those waters, some weighing in at 400 to 700 pounds and over six feet long (although those giants, sometimes referred to as barn doors, are rare due to overfishing) are caught in waters off the eastern U.S., Canada, and Greenland, as well as Iceland and the North Atlantic waters of Europe. The seasonality of the Atlantic species is regulated by fishing quotas rather than natural seasonal cycles due to the overfishing of that region over the years.

Pacific halibut are caught in waters off the coasts of Alaska, Canada, Washington, Oregon, and California. They are the most widely available of the species because they are sustainably managed, especially in the waters off the Alaskan coast.

The Pacific halibut are generally smaller than their Atlantic cousins, commonly ranging from 20 to 40 pounds, but can grow to 100 pounds or more.

Pacific halibut is generally considered the best for eating—especially from Alaska—because its balance of moisture and firmness makes for consistent results however it is prepared.

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Halibut is often favored, particularly by those who are less likely to order or prepare fish as their first choice for a main meal. The flesh is white and fairly lean, with a firmer texture when compared to cod or hake. It flakes when cooked similar to cod, but still remains together. That firmer texture lends itself to a wide range of preparations, the best of which keep the fish moist and showcase its mild, clean flavor.

Some cooking methods are pan-searing then finishing in the oven; poaching in broth, butter, olive oil, or even milk; baking, especially en papillote (enclosed in parchment); grilling over coals, great for bone-in steaks or thick-cut filets.

The recipe that follows features Pacific halibut filets which were pan-seared and then finished in the oven. The filets are plated atop a tangy base of peperonata and topped with a shaved fennel salad. Here is how I put it together.

Pan-Seared Halibut Filet with Peperonata and Shaved Fennel Salad

Peperonata

I prepared this dish using the recipe I published in 2015 in the post titled [The Side Show](#), which can be found here: [The Side Show](#).

Shaved Fennel Salad

Ingredients

- 1 small fennel bulb, trimmed and thinly sliced/shaved using a mandoline
- 1 medium shallot, peeled and sliced into thin rounds
- 1 teaspoon capers, rinsed and finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon fresh mint, rough chopped

Dressing

Ingredients

- 1 teaspoon Dijon
- 1 clove of garlic, finely minced
- Juice from 1 medium lemon
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- Salt, pepper, red chili flakes to your taste

Halibut

Ingredients (serves 4)

1 pound Pacific halibut filet, skinned

Butter

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

Method

Prepare the peperonata as instructed in the post Side Show, and set aside.

Prepare the ingredients for the shaved fennel salad as described above, toss together in a glass or stainless work bowl and set aside. Do not dress until ready to plate the final dish.

Whisk together all the ingredients for the dressing, slowly streaming in the olive oil as you whisk until a smooth emulsion is reached. Check and adjust the seasoning to your taste and set aside until ready to combine into the salad before plating the final dish.



Salad ready to toss

Remove the skin from the halibut filet, or have your fish merchant do that for you. Rinse the filet and pat it dry with paper towels. Cut the filet into 4 individual pieces.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Lightly season both sides of the filets with salt and pepper.



Seasoned filets

In a large, ovenproof sauté pan placed over medium-high temperature, warm 4 tablespoons of olive oil until hot but not smoking. Place the cut filets in the pan and sear for 2 to 3 minutes, without lifting them, until they begin to flake and lightly brown.



Searred



Ready for oven

Gently turn the filets using a fish spatula, add 2 tablespoons of butter to the pan and sauté the filets 1 additional minute.

Swirl the pan around to evenly distribute the melted butter and quickly baste each filet. Place the pan in the preheated oven and cook the filets for 5 minutes or until done, careful not to cook too long and dry out the filets.

Remove the pan from the oven to assemble the final dish.

While the filets are in the oven, lightly dress and toss the shaved fennel salad. There is more dressing than needed for this salad, although the remainder can be taken to the table for those who might enjoy a little extra on their salad.

To plate the dish, portion two generous tablespoons of the peperonata in the center of each plate. Place the cooked halibut filet on top of the peperonata and finally arrange a tangle of the shaved fennel salad atop the filet. Serve the plated dish straightaway.



Plated



Bonus: For those of you who might not want to prepare the dish just presented, the following recipe is quick and simple, offering another approach to enjoying a halibut filet which you can pair with your choice of a vegetable or a side salad.

Pan-Seared Halibut with Lemon Butter

Ingredients (serves 2)

2 skinned halibut filets approximately 5 to 6 ounces each

Olive oil

Butter

1 garlic clove minced

1 lemon, zested and juiced

Fresh minced parsley to finish the dish

Method

Rinse the the filets and pat them dry with paper towels.

Lightly season both sides of the filets with salt and pepper.

In a large, sauté pan placed over medium-high temperature, warm 2 tablespoons of olive oil until hot but not smoking. Place the filets in the pan and sear for 2 to 3 minutes, without lifting them, until they begin to flake and lightly brown. Using a fish spatula, carefully turn the filets and sauté for another 2 to 3 minutes.

Turn the temperature down to low and add 2 tablespoons of butter and the minced garlic. Swirl the pan around to evenly distribute the melted butter and quickly baste each filet.

Add the lemon juice and sprinkle the zest over and around the filets. Spoon the sauce over the filets for an additional minute and then plate.

Drizzle the remaining pan sauce over the plated filets and sprinkle with some of the minced parsley. Done!

You now have two of the many ways of preparing this flavorful versatile fish. The season is right on schedule, so what are you waiting for?

Pay a visit to your favorite fish merchant to select a couple of choice filets for you to prepare. Or, if you are so inclined, why not venture out on either the Atlantic side or the Pacific side and catch one for yourself!

Either way I think you will like the results of what you eventually cook.

Enjoy!



Eat well • Drink well • Be well

Though eating is one of life's unavoidable necessities, dining has always been one of it's greatest pleasures.