How to Clean Whole Fish

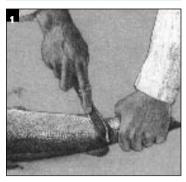


ost of us buy our fish cut to order—if we want a fillet, we buy one; if we want a whole fish, scaled and gutted, that's what we ask for. But there are times when you may want to "butcher" a fish yourself; and although it's difficult to do as good a job of filleting as someone who practices all day long, there is no single

aspect that you can't do adequately with a minimum of practice.

What follow here are general rules for most finfish. For tools, you will need three knives: a sharp ten- or twelve-inch chef's knife; a paring knife; and a boning or fillet knife with a six- to eight-inch-long blade that may be either flexible or rigid. ■

SCALING

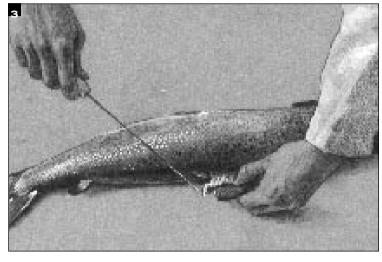


1. Rinse the fish and place it on a flat surface. Holding the fish by the tail, use the back of a knife, a spoon, or a fish scaler, and begin scraping from the tail toward the head with short, authoritative strokes. Scale the whole fish, including the belly and back, and rinse it well.



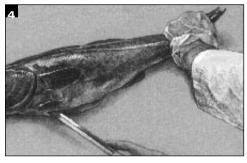
2. Use a boning or paring knife to make a ½-inch-long cut on each side of the fin. Make both cuts on an angle, so that you form a V with the fin in the middle.

REMOVING FINS



3. Use your hands or a pair of pliers to pull out the fin, along with the bones that attach it to the fish.

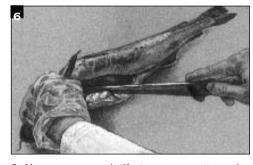
GUTTING



4. With a sharp, small knife, cut a slit from the fish's anal opening to the gill openings.



5. Pull out the innards with your fingers.

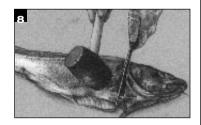


6. Use a spoon or knife to scrape out any innards that remain. Rinse the fish.

BEHEADING



7. Make a cut on either side of the fish's head just above the pectoral



8. Hit the back of your knife with a rubber mallet if you have trouble cutting through the fish's thick neck bones

GILLING

(Don't bother if beheading.)



9. Snip the gills at the bottom with a knife or scissors to detach them.



10. Next, snip the gills at the top and remove with your fingers. They can be sharp, so be careful.

THE TAIL



11. Cut off the tail.

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12. Using a sharp, heavy knife or cleaver, cut through the fish to make steaks of the desired thickness, usually an inch or so. Try to make the cuts even and clean. If the central bone gives you trouble, rest the knife against it and whack the back of the knife with a wooden or rubber mallet, as pictured in illustration 8.

CUTTING STEAKS

FILLETING



13. Lay the fish on its side, and make a top-to-bottom cut behind the gill cover.



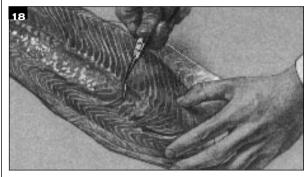
14. With the back of the fish toward you, make a long cut along the back from the gill cover to the tail, following the line of the central bone. Lift the flesh as you cut, to reveal the central bone and make the job easier.



15. Turn the fish so that the belly is toward you and, again, make a long cut from gill to tail. The tip of the knife should meet the first cut at the central bone, and the fillet will be released.

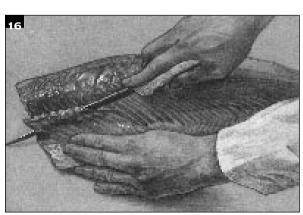


REMOVING PIN BONES

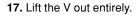


18. Remove pin bones with needle-nose or similar pliers, as shown, or by cutting a "zip-strip," making a V-shaped cut on either side of the bones and pulling out the V with your fingers.

SKINNING



16. The thin belly flap may contain a row of bones. Use your fillet knife to cut underneath them from each side, forming a V shape.





19. Make a small cut at the narrow end of the fillet and grab the skin. Use a sharp knife, held parallel to the skin, to run between the skin and flesh.