



Stop carping and Start cooking

Many anglers view carp as a problem, but it's a problem that we may be able to eat our way out of.

(Larsh Bristol)

Carp are one of the most popular fish in the world, but they haven't caught on much in the United States. However, many other cultures and a few adventurous types here in the states enjoy the rewards of eating carp.

Perhaps the most recent waves of carp invaders — big-head, grass and silver carp — will prove even more delectable than the older invader, the common carp.

The information below was excerpted from the "Carp" chapter of *Fishing for Buffalo, A Guide to the Pursuit, Lore & Cuisine of Buffalo, Carp, Mooneye, Gar and other "Rough" Fish*, published in 1990 by Culpepper Press.

CARP CUISINE

By Rob Buffler and Tom Dickson

If you catch carp from clean northern lakes and rivers or from trout streams, you'll likely end up with delicious fillets. Taken from clean water, carp are actually cleaner than most other fish because they have fewer parasites than fish like walleyes and salmon.

Many people believe a carp tastes muddy because the fish feeds on the bottom. Occasionally, a carp does taste bad. This comes from industrial contaminants, human waste, and other pollutants in the water that are absorbed into the fish's blood stream and the fatty and dark areas of the meat like the blood line. If a carp comes from turbid or polluted water, it will probably have taken on some of the smell, just as a walleye or bass from the same water would. In Austria, live carp bought at the market are put in the bathtub with clean water trickling in for a day before the fish are killed. This works for any fish, and can take the muddy taste from a carp even when caught in mid-summer.

For most of us, however, keeping a fish alive in the tub is impractical. The next best thing is to keep your carp alive on a stringer while you fish. String it through the lips, not the gills.

If the fish is hooked deeply, cut the line rather than rip out the hook, because a fish will survive with a hook imbedded in its throat but not with a gash there.

When it's time to go home, kill the fish by knocking it on the head. Chop off the head and tail, draining out as much blood as possible. Split the belly, pull out the entrails and gills, and wash the blood from the body cavity. Put the fish on ice.

Unlike walleye and sheepshead, which can be filleted in the same time it takes to zip a jacket, carp take a few extra minutes to clean and prepare. For many connoisseurs, it is worth the trouble.

With the fish on its side, fillet it by cutting straight down just below the gill plate, as though you were going to cut its head off. Stop just before you reach halfway and turn the blade sideways, towards the tail. Run the knife parallel to the spine. Flip the fillet over, and, with the skin side down, run your knife along the bottom of the fillet to cut it from the skin. You are left with a perfect fillet. Cut out the dark vein, which runs down the side, and all the dark red meat just under where the skin was. This flesh contains the most oil and blood and is what carries any bad flavor.

The bones of a carp are a great mystery to anglers. They are hard to find when filleting, but sometimes show up inside your cheek during dinner.

SMOKED CARP

Dark ales or lager beers make the best companions for smoked fish. For wine, the best bet is a very dry sparkling wine such as Cristallino Brut, Korbel Natural or Korbel Brut Rosé. Avoid extra dry bubbly, because in champagne parlance the term means "somewhat sweet."

PICKLED CARP

My first inclination would serve beer or ale rather than wine. I recommend a dark brew, such as Bass Ale, Mexican Negra Modelo, Newcastle Brown Ale or Guinness Stout. Wines should be avoided because the vinegar in the pickling recipes will tend to clash with most of them, however a medium-dry Amontillado sherry or Rainwater Madeira might work.

DEVILED CARP

Various versions of spicy Deviled Carp being a great favorite in Central Europe, most notably in Austria, I suggest accompanying it with a mellow medium-dry Riesling Kabinett or Spätlese, or an extra dry champagne or Sekt.

PONTY FUSZERMARTASSAL

I suggest a dry and intense Dry Creek Vineyard Fumé Blanc.

CARP AUX RAISINS

I recommend a raisiny Beerenauslese, a late-harvest Riesling or Sauvignon Blanc, a Marsala or a sweet Sauterne.

FILETS DE CARPE MARINIÈRE

Try a very light red Zinfandel or Chianti, or a full-bodied Zinfandel Rosé.

RED-IN-SNOW CARP

I would use a dry sherry. Enjoy!

John Breitlow writes about wine in Winona, Minn. His last article for Big River was "Following in the Footsteps of Lewis and Clark," March-April 2004.

CARP — THE OTHER WHITE MEAT?

By Trudy Balcom

Is it safe to eat carp? According to the fish consumption guidelines of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois, the answer is an unqualified "yes."

"Fish are an excellent food source, high in protein, vitamins and minerals and low in saturated fat," said Minnesota Commissioner of Health Dianne Mandernach. "And studies have shown that eating fish may help prevent heart disease in adults. However, even fish should be eaten in moderation, because any fish could contain harmful chemicals, such as mercury or polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)."

Carp are safer to eat because of what they eat. Although the term bottom feeder has negative connotations, carp are safer to eat than many gamefish. Carp are omnivores that eat mollusks, insect larvae and some vegetation,

among other things. As a result, toxins, such as mercury and PCBs, accumulate more slowly in their tissue compared to most game fish. Game fish, such as walleye and northern pike, concentrate toxins when they eat fish that have also been exposed to toxins.

For example, following the guidelines for pregnant women and children for fish from pools 2 and 3 in the Mississippi (just below the Twin Cities), the Minnesota Department of Health recommends only one meal per week of walleye, but places no limit on the amount of carp (for fish under 15 inches for both species) to avoid unsafe levels of mercury.

(Carp continued on page 5)



Once the rib bones have been sliced off, you can remove half of the carp's other bones by making a deep incision the length of the outside of the fillet along the lateral line and then another one from the top of the fillet to cut a long V-channel from the fillet. This removes the 20 Y-bones and 6 straight bones above the lateral line. Below are 4 Y-bones and 13 straight bones. These can be broken up by slicing two-thirds of the way down through the fillet every quarter inch. When the fillet is fried, the hot oil seeps into the incisions and softens the bones enough to make eating a pleasure.

If your refrigerator is full and you want to have carp on hand throughout the year, you can preserve carp several ways:

Smoking Scale the fish. Fillet, keeping the skin on. Soak all night in a salt solution that will float an egg. Rinse the fillet in fresh water. Smoke in a smoker 4 to 8 hours at 170 to 180 degrees.

Pressure cooking This is a good way to soften the bones. Partially cook the fillet by broiling in the oven for a few minutes on each side of the fillet. Pack the fillets closely in clean jars to about 1 inch from the top. Add 1 teaspoon of salt to each quart jar. Don't add water. Cap. Pressure cook according to cooker instructions.

Pickling This is a super appetizer that's sure to have your

friends begging you for the recipe. Pickling gives carp a tangy sour taste that goes great with crackers. The fillets need not be scored, as the vinegar softens the bones. Cut the fillets into domino-sized pieces, and put in canning jars. Soak overnight in a solution of 1/2 vinegar and 1/2 water. Drain and place in a boiling solution of 3 cups vinegar and 1 cup water. Add cloves, allspice, mustard seed, salt and pepper, and lemon slices. Boil fish until done. Saving the liquid, place pieces in a sterilized jar and cover with sliced onions. Pour the boiling solution into the jars and seal.

RECIPES

Carp taste great, and they are good for you, too. A 4-ounce serving of carp provides 40 to 50 percent of the protein you need in a day. Carp are also high in phosphorus, which is good for the brain. Carp are low in fat, and much of this can be filleted off. A 6-ounce serving of carp has only 213 calories.

Carp can be delicious in hundreds of ways. Your imagination is the only limitation. Europeans, who have been feasting on carp for centuries, use the fish in the finest dishes served in expensive restaurants. Many farms in France and Belgium have carp ponds where the fish is netted for dinner. In Greece, carp roe is called taramosalata and is prized as a delicacy. In Austria, deviled carp is a favorite dish. Poles cook carp in aspic. Hungarians serve cold carp in paprika sauce, and the Czechs have

influenced the Austrian dish "Carp Baked in Black Sauce."

Carp cooked *au bleu* is a delicacy served in fine Austrian restaurants in the lake region. There, live carp kept in ponds are killed and cooked immediately in boiling water seasoned with peppercorns, salt, and vinegar, and then are served with melted butter and parsley.

If you have any trepidation about eating carp for the first time, try deep-frying pieces of fillet cut to the size of dominos. Eat the golden tidbits with beer and french fries. There's no one on earth who doesn't like this.

One of the oldest recipes for carp was published over 300 years ago by Izaak Walton in *The Compleat Angler*. Prepare it and taste a bit of angling history.

"Take an carp, scour him and rub him clean with water and salt, but scale him nor; then open him and put him with his blood and liver, into a small pot; then take sweet majoram, thyme and parsley, of each half-a-handful, a sprig of rosemary, and another of savory, bind them into two or three small bundles and put them to your carp, with four or five whole onions, twenty pickled oysters and three anchovies. Then pour upon your carp as much claret wine as will cover him and season your claret well with salt, cloves, mace and the rinds of oranges and lemons."

While Walton's recipe might not bring out the best in a carp (you've got to wonder about those anchovies), these 5 carp recipes — 3 European, one Chinese, and one American — are renowned for their flavor.

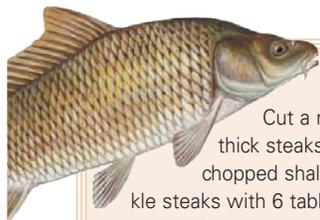
Ponty Fuszermartassal (Deviled Carp)

Preheat oven to 350°. Heat 3 tablespoons bacon fat or lard in an 8-inch skillet over high heat until a light haze forms over it. Then reduce heat to medium, and add 3 cups finely chopped onions. Cook 8—10 minutes, or until lightly colored. Turn off the heat, and stir in 2 Tablespoons sweet Hungarian paprika. Return the skillet to medium heat and add 1 large green pepper diced and 1 cup chopped tomatoes peeled and seeded. Cover tightly and cook 5 minutes. Stir in 1/4 cup dry white wine.

Scrape half the vegetable mixture into a buttered 8- by 12-inch shallow baking dish, approximately 2 inches deep. Cut 6—8 steaks 1-inch thick from a 5-pound carp cleaned and scaled. Sprinkle the carp steaks generously with salt and a few grindings of black pepper. Arrange them in one layer in the baking dish, and cover with the rest of the vegetables. Bake in the middle of the oven for 15—18 minutes, or until the fish is firm to the touch and flakes easily when prodded gently with a fork.

Arrange the fish steaks on a serving platter, cover them loosely with foil, and keep them warm in a 200° oven while you make the sauce.

With a wire whisk, beat 1 tablespoon flour into 1/2 cup sour cream in a small mixing bowl, then stir the mixture into the pan juices. Bring to a boil and then reduce the heat. Simmer on top of the stove, stirring constantly for 4 or 5 minutes or until sauce is thick and creamy. Cover the carp with the sauce.



Carp aux Raisins

Cut a medium-sized (5-pound) carp into 1-inch-thick steaks, and saute with 1 chopped onion and 3 chopped shallots in 1/2 cup of oil in a large skillet. Sprinkle steaks with 6 tablespoons flour. Almost cover the fish with 2 cups white wine and fish stock (or water). Season with salt and a touch of cayenne. Add 2 crushed garlic cloves. Sprinkle with a few tablespoons of oil. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover, and simmer slowly for 20 minutes.

Drain the carp steaks and set them on a dish, reforming the shape of the carp.

Over high heat, reduce the liquid by two-thirds, remove from the heat, and beat in 3/4 cup oil. Add 2 teaspoons powdered sugar, 2 tablespoons wine vinegar, 1/3 cup seeded raisins, and 1/3 cup currants and sultanas (mixed) which have been allowed to swell in lukewarm water and drained. Pour over the carp, sprinkle with chopped parsley, and serve at once.

Filets de Carpe Mariniere

Fillet a medium-sized (5-pound) carp, season with salt and pepper, and poach for 10 minutes in 1/2 cup concentrated fish stock or water. Drain the fillets, and cover with Mariniere sauce: Melt 1/2 cup butter over low heat. Remove from heat and let stand 5 minutes. Skim clear butter fat from top and place it in a small saucepan. Cook butter slowly over low heat until it turns light brown. Add 1 tablespoon chopped parsley and 1 teaspoon lemon juice.

Carp Dumplings

This American dish is great for winter Sundays while watching football games. The smell of cooked dumpling wafts through the house and gets your guests salivating.

First, in a 2-quart pot, make a bouillon: In 1/4 cup butter, brown 1 onion, 2 stalks celery, and 1 carrot, all chopped. Add 2 pints hot water, 2 tablespoons salt, 1/4 teaspoon white pepper. Boil 30—40 minutes.

Prepare the fish mixture by putting 1 pound carp fillet, 1 onion, and 2 small pieces of celery through a grinder. Mix together with 4 slices white bread, trimmed and rubbed to fine crumbs, 1 teaspoon dried parsley, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon white pepper. Add 3 well-beaten eggs, and mix.

Drop by spoonfuls into the boiling bouillon, and cook until done (about 5 minutes). Serve with chile sauce.

Red-in-Snow Carp

In a large, heavy skillet, heat 2 tablespoons peanut oil. Add 1 chopped scallion and 4 slices chopped ginger. Add a whole 2-pound carp, scaled, 1 tablespoon sherry, 1/2 cup sliced bamboo shoots, and 1 cup chicken broth. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce to a light boil, and cook for 5 minutes.

Add 1/2 cup red-in-snow (a Chinese vegetable available from an Asian grocery) or broccoli, salt to taste, and simmer 2 or 3 minutes until done. 🌿

SIZE MATTERS

When it comes to food safety, smaller fish are better, because they have had less time to accumulate dangerous chemicals. This rule applies to carp and game fish. In the Mississippi River, both Minnesota and Wisconsin generally agree carp that are less than 15 inches long are safe to eat as frequently as you like, except for fish from pools 1, 7 and 8. Minnesota recommends no more than one meal per week from these areas for pregnant women and children. For carp larger than 15 inches, both Minnesota and Wisconsin generally recommend no more than one meal per month, due to PCBs. The states agree that fish from Pools 5, 5a and 6 are the safest. In Illinois, the Department of Natural Re-

A few commercial fishermen on the Illinois River are harvesting bighead and silver carp for fresh fish markets in New York and Los Angeles.

sources recommends one meal per week of carp of any size, except for fish taken from Pool 15, where they recommend only one meal per month for carp of any size.

ASIAN DELICACY

Anglers in areas below Pool 10 may catch so-called "Asian" carp — bighead or silver carp that are recent migrants to this region. Although the fish are unwelcome invaders into the Mississippi River ecosystem and sometimes jump and strike unwary boaters, they are just as safe to eat as common carp. A few commercial fishermen on the Illinois River are harvesting bighead and silver carp for fresh fish markets in New York and Los Angeles (Minneapolis Star Tribune 6-15-04). The white flesh is reportedly considered a delicacy in Asia.

GUIDELINES

Detailed fish consumption guidelines or advisories are issued by Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois and follow U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommendations. To date, Iowa does not is-

sue a detailed guideline, only warnings about fish from particular locations that are unsafe. Iowa follows U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines. These are generally less stringent and are updated less frequently than EPA rules.

The advisories are intended to protect anglers and their families from overexposure to mercury and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls — a potent cancer-causing chemical) and other toxic chemicals found in fish, which are particularly harmful to children and pregnant women. ☞

More Carp Recipes



THESE RECIPES WERE GATHERED FROM CUSTOMERS OF BUD RAMER FISH COMPANY.

Buttermilk Fried Carp Fillets

2 pounds carp fillets
1 cup buttermilk
1 cup biscuit mix or pancake mix
2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon dried lemon flakes

Remove the skin of the carp. Take out all the brownish-reddish part of the meat (the mud vein), discard. Chunk up the rest of the carp fillets.

Place fillet pieces in a shallow dish. Pour the buttermilk over them and let it stand for half an hour, turning the fillets over once during that time.

Stir the salt into the biscuit mix.

Take fillets out of the buttermilk and pat them into the biscuit mix, covering both sides.

Fry fillets in deep fryer or in hot oil in fry-pan for 5 to 10 minutes until cooked through and browned on both sides. Use tongs or slotted spoon to turn them. (If oil is too hot, they will brown too quickly and not cook within.)

Drain on paper towels. Serves 4 to 6.

Carp Sandwich

Skin the carp. Remove the reddish-brown part of the meat (the mud vein). Fillet the carp. Score the fillets by cutting about two-thirds into the meat every 1/4 inch. Cut into sandwich-size pieces.

Beat one or more egg. Dip fish pieces into egg, then into salted bread crumbs, or saltine cracker crumbs.

Deep fry or pan fry in lots of oil, after oil is plenty hot (about medium to medium high).

Use your favorite bread or hamburger buns, spread bread with tartar sauce or sandwich spread.

Place browned and tender fish fillets between the slices. Add whatever garnishes you'd like — lettuce, tomato, etc.

Carp with Sour-Cream Sauce

1/4 cup butter
2 bay leaves
1/3 cup sour cream
1 lemon, made into juice, or about 1 to 2 Tablespoons lemon juice
salt and pepper
1 whole carp, 3 to 4 pound, cleaned

Grease a shallow baking dish with butter. Season carp inside and out with salt and pepper. Place bay leaves on butter pats and lay them on top of the carp. Cover with sour cream and lemon juice. Bake at 350°F for 40 minutes or when brown. Baste frequently.

Serve with noodles or potatoes. Makes 4 servings.

Carp roasted with onion

1 pound of carp
1 cup grated onion
1/4 cup dried parsley
Oil
Lemon juice
salt
Caraway seeds
Cumin, optional

Cut up cleaned carp into large sections. Cut out small pockets in the carp meat. Sprinkle with salt.

Mix grated onion with parsley and a little oil. Rub this mixture over the carp. Fill the holes also with a little of this mixture. Spread caraway seeds over the meat, pour some lemon juice on top.

Roast in 350°F oven for about 30 minutes or until done. Serve with potatoes, roasted, mashed, or fried.

Carp Tacos

1 pound ground carp
3 Tablespoons vegetable oil
1 package taco seasoning
1/2 cup water
Sliced tomato (or salsa)
12 flour tortillas
Shredded lettuce
Grated cheddar cheese
Taco sauce
Sour cream

Before shredding the fish, remove mud vein, or reddish-brown section of meat. Cook the shredded fish in oil until its color changes. Add the taco seasoning and water. Cook until nearly dry, stirring occasionally. Heat flour tortillas in a dry fry-pan, turning to lightly brown on both sides. They should still be soft and pliable when warm. Fill each tortilla with fish mixture. Add grated cheese, taco sauce, lettuce, tomato chunks (or salsa) and top with sour cream.

Carp Casserole

3 cups cooked carp
2 cups cooked rice
2 Tablespoons grated onion
2 Tablespoons melted margarine
1 Tablespoon minced parsley
1 Tablespoon lemon juice
1/2 cup milk
2 well-beaten eggs
1 tsp. salt, pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350°F. Combine ingredients. Place in greased loaf pan. Bake for 40 minutes. Serve with fresh salad, small boiled and buttered potatoes sprinkled with parsley, and creamed peas.

Baked Carp with Dressing

SUBMITTED BY HARRIS MCKEE, FORMER COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN, LANSING, IOWA. THIS WAS HIS MOTHER'S RECIPE.

1 large carp, 10 lbs or larger, filleted

Dressing:

2 bags of toasted bread cubes

2 quarts stewed tomatoes

1 1/2 sticks margarine or butter melted

4 eggs

3/4 cup sugar

salt and pepper to taste

Mix all dressing ingredients together. Season carp fillets with salt and pepper and place in a large roasting pan. Place dressing mix on top, and layer additional fillets on top as needed. Bake in 350° oven for 3 to 3 1/2 hours. Last 1/2 hour baste with a mixture of tomato, brown sugar, catsup and mustard.



Carp art by Duane Raver/USFWS.

Update 2009: Tom Dickson has a new book, *The Great Minnesota Fish Book*, available in bookstores and from the U of Minn. Press.

Shopping for Carp

Mississippi River carp are available in fish markets and even supermarkets from the Twin Cities to Fulton, Illinois.

Recipes and formulas for smoking carp differ from place to place, so sample different sources.

Check Cub Foods and Rainbow Foods throughout the Twin Cities. Call individual stores for availability.

Finer Meat Co.

3747 Nicollet Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55409-1236
(612) 823-4494

Engh's Fish Market

4100 State Rd 35
Genoa, WI 54632
(608) 689-2394
(smoked only)

Mohn's Fish Market

1140 Great River Rd.
Harpers Ferry, IA 52146
(563) 586-2269

Valley Fish Market

304 S. Prairie St.
Prairie du Chien, WI 53821
(608) 326-4719

Fish R Us

7634 Rt. 84
Savanna, IL 61074
(815) 273-3277

Schaeffer Fisheries

21985 Waller Rd.
Fulton, IL 61252
1-800-291-FISH