

Fishing Equipment & Tips

Filleting Your Catch

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Fishing has many rewards - relaxing, spending time with friends & family outdoors, fodder for great stories, and the opportunity to provide yourself and your family with fresh food that you harvested. I have many great memories from childhood that include learning how to fillet my own fish, the smells of fresh fish cooking over the campfire, and the oneness with my entire family as we all enjoyed our first bite of the day's fresh catch. Even my sister, who won't eat fish from a restaurant, will eat a freshly cooked fillet of our catch of the day.

Cleaning your fish properly is key for a successful dinner later on. Using proper filleting techniques will help you reduce bones in your fillets and make the fillets healthier by removing areas that may contain pollutants the fish pick up from feeding in our lakes & rivers.

Lesson 6:5 - Eating Fish  (28 pages | 5.2 MB), our **Featured Lesson** for this newsletter includes information on how to determine the benefits and minimize the risks of eating contaminants by eating fish. This lesson also includes step-by-step instructions on how to fillet sunfish which is outlined below.

Teaching yourself and your children how to fillet fish will take time and practice. Here are some tips on how to do this safely & successfully.

- Use a sharp filleting knife - dull knives make filleting more difficult and dangerous
- Start out with small fish like sunfish or yellow perch
- Plan that your first fillets may not provide much for a meal, but celebrate your filleting success regardless of the size of the final fillet
- Be sure to cut away from yourself - be diligent about reminding your children to keep the sharp side of the blade pointed away from their hands, arms, & bodies
- Getting messy is OK! Cleaning fresh fish is messy, use gloves if you choose and roll up your sleeves, fillet outdoors if the weather is nice.
- Allow yourself and your kids to take time to look at the insides of the fish. Point out the gills, look for the air bladder and stomach. Some fish will have eggs. **Lesson 6:5 - Eating Fish**  (28 pages | 5.2 MB) includes a diagram of the internal anatomy of a yellow perch. Use the diagram as a guide to identify the internal organs as you fillet.



Filleting a Bluegill

Start out with a sharpened fillet knife, clean cutting surface, and your rinsed fish. If you are using a reusable cutting board, be sure to label it for fish.

Preparing different meats & vegetables on the same cutting board may transfer bacteria that need to be cooked away at different temperatures.



Raise the pectoral fin. Lay the knife just behind the fin and head. Cut through the body cavity to the backbone.



Slice along the backbone with the point of the blade from your first cut all the way to the tail. This cut does not need to be very deep, this will start the separation of the meat from the ribs.



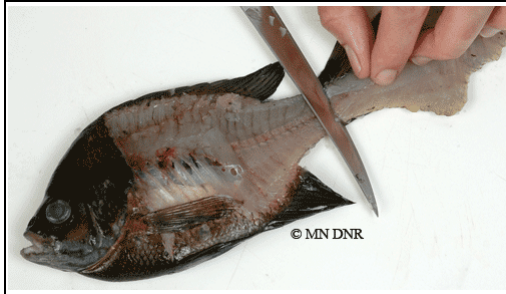
Hold the fish firmly. Turn the blade nearly parallel to the backbone and with a sawing motion, cut through the rib section toward the tail. You will feel the ribs with the blade, they will release from the flesh as you gently pull the fillet away from the blade.



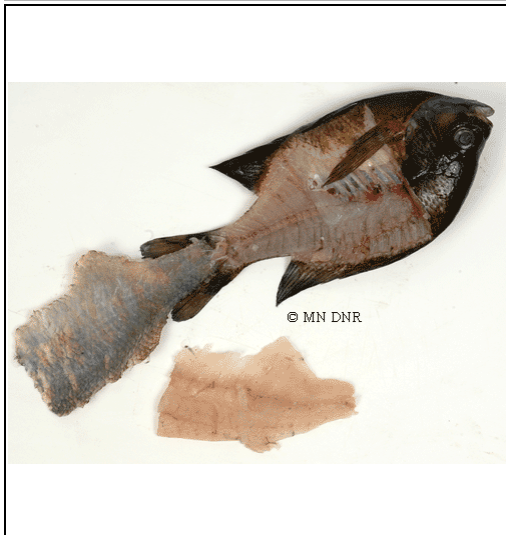
Stop at the base of the tail, it is best not to cut the fillet all of the way off.



To skin the fillet, hold the tail firmly with your fingertips and work the flat of the blade forward between the flesh and the skin using a sawing motion.



Set your fillet aside and flip the fish over to repeat the process. Cut away the dark area running the length of the fillet (this isn't always as visible in all species). To do this, cut a V-shaped trough around the length of the dark line and remove it by using your fingers. This is an area of fatty tissue that may store contaminants. Cut off any other fatty areas on the back and belly sides of the fillet - they will be darker in color than the rest of the fillet.



Different species of fish require slightly different filleting techniques. Here are some videos demonstrating how to fillet different species of fish commonly caught in Minnesota.

- Take Me Fishing – **Cleaning Your Fish**
- Take Me Fishing – **Storing Your Fish**
- **How To Fillet Fish** - Filleting Walleye Learn how to safely fillet fish with children in this step by step tutorial
- **Just North Outdoors** - In these videos you will learn how to clean your catch. Fillet Northern Pike boneless, fillet Walleye boneless, and see how to clean a perch in 10 seconds.
- **Cleaning Catfish**
- **How to Fillet Panfish** with Muskie Mike