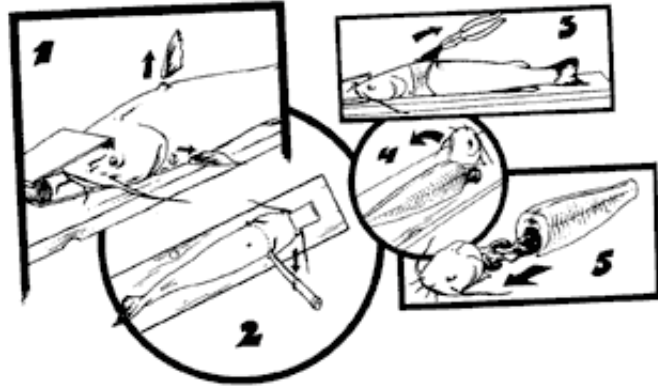


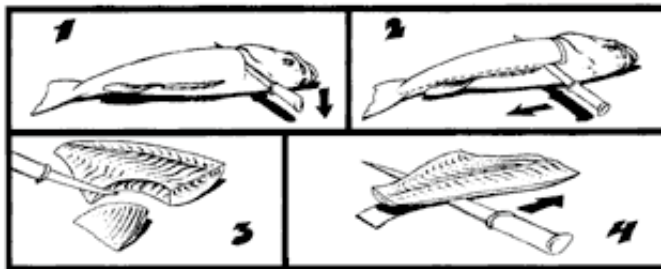


Removing the skin improves the taste of many fish. It also removes a layer of fat just under the skin. Catfish are usually skinned.

To skin a catfish or bullhead, hold its head firmly on a flat surface with a clamp. For safety, it is a good idea to snip off a catfish's spines before skinning. Then, cut through the skin behind the head and the pectoral fins. Use pliers to remove the skin from the body, pulling from the head toward the tail. Grasp the head of the fish with one hand and the body with the other. Break the backbone at the head. Pull the head and guts away from the skinned body. After you wash the fish in clean water, it's ready for cooking. You remove the fish's bones just before you eat it.



## Filleting



Filleting means getting the meat of the fish without the bones. Larger fish, such as largemouth bass, northern pike, salmon, and walleye, are usually filleted. A filleted fish has its skin and all of its bones removed before cooking. Scaling isn't necessary. Fillet knives have a long, thin, blade that's very sharp and specifically designed for filleting fish.

Have an adult help as you learn to fillet. A fillet knife is dangerous and must be handled safely. If you have any slime on your hands or the knife handle, wash it off to prevent slipping. Always keep your hands in back of the blade. For added safety, wear metal-mesh "fish-cleaning" gloves to protect your hands.

To fillet a fish, lay it on its side on a flat surface. Cut the fish behind its gills and pectoral fin down to, but not through, the backbone. Without removing the knife, turn the blade and cut through the ribs toward the tail. Use the fish's backbone to guide you. Turn the fish over and repeat the steps.

Next, insert the knife blade close to the rib bones and slice the entire rib section of each fillet away. Then, with the skin side down, insert the knife blade about a 1/2-inch from the tail. Gripping this tail part firmly, put the blade between the skin and the meat at an angle. Using a little pressure and a sawing motion, cut against - not through - the skin. The fillet will be removed from the skin.

Wash each fillet in cold water. Pat dry with a clean cloth or paper towel. The fillets are ready to cook or freeze.

## Steaking

A large fish is often cut across the body into thick steaks. First, clean the fish and skin or scale it. Usually, a fish is scaled only if the scales make it difficult to cut the steaks. Before steaking, chill the fish or put it in a freezer until it is partly stiff.

For most fish, cut through the body, working from the tail toward the head. Make each steak from 1/2-inch to 1-inch thick. After steaking, trim away any belly fat or bones that you can see, but not the backbone.

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