- Pound for pound, amberjack is one of the best fighting fish.

- A few simple steps yield large quantities of high quality meat.

- Amberjack's firm, light meat is excellent baked, charcoaled, broiled or smoked.
It's widely known that amberjack are exciting fish to catch and hard fighters that are relatively easy to hook and land. But did you know that these big cruisers are also easy to cook and clean, yielding thick fillets, and that when cooked they have white, mild-tasting meat? Fishermen interviewed throughout the South Atlantic states who have come to know and appreciate amberjack testify to its excellence as a food fish. One fisherman said that a well-known seafood restaurant in St. Petersburg served amberjack on its seafood platter, calling it “grouper fingers.” Others said that, although amberjack is usually smoked, if cooked when fresh its meat can be as delicate as grouper. In fact, in many ways, amberjack are similar to highly prized fish in the Atlantic, such as king and spanish mackerel, wahoo, and cobia, that recreational fishermen actively seek not only for sport but for food as well.

If amberjack are so good, why don’t more fishermen eat them? Luckily for the amberjack, these fish have enjoyed the reputation of having worms, of spoiling easily, and of being strong tasting. It is sometimes true that amberjack have worms. But so do most fish, even grouper and trout, and amberjack’s worms are usually confined to the tail section. Fishermen who eat amberjack usually cut off the tail and eat the shoulder, which contains most of the fish’s meat anyway. Often without ever trying amberjack because of rumors like these, many fishermen tend to throw them back or toss them aside, never realizing what they are missing.

The truth of the matter is that amberjack can be prepared many ways, that their meat is white when cooked, and that they can make fine table fare. Indeed, many restaurants around the United States serve amberjack as a matter of course. Some of the myths about amberjack may have arisen because there are a few steps involved with their preparation that, at first, may strike some fishermen as being too time consuming. But, as amberjack generally run large in size, taking the few steps necessary to convert this fish into a palatable dish is well worth the time. The main requirement in cleaning this fish is that it has to be bled. Once bled, its meat is no stronger tasting than king mackerel's and is as delicious as wahoo's.
the species

Twelve species of amberjack are found in the Western Atlantic with the greater amberjack, *seriola demerilli*, being the most important sport fish. The species is usually caught offshore, though a few are caught inshore from piers or in deep troughs formed by the surf. In South Atlantic waters, the fish is found in North Carolina from May through the autumn months while water temperatures remain high. Further south in Florida waters it is caught throughout the year. Amberjack have been caught in sizes up to 125 pounds, but the 30-pound range is most common for this fish. Because many larger fish contain parasites near the tail section, the word has spread among many sport fishermen that amberjack is inedible. Because of this, a great deal of high quality finfish is wasted each year. When properly cleaned and dressed, amberjack has a firm-textured, high quality light meat, which can be served in a variety of ways. The purpose of this brochure is to discuss some of the attributes of amberjack and to show fishermen how to dress them properly in order to better utilize this resource.

how to catch them

Amberjack are caught in a variety of ways, often incidentally when fishing for king mackerel or snapper-grouper. In fact, fishermen have been known to complain about having problems getting their bait past 30-pound amberjack in order to catch two-pound red snapper.

Amberjack concentrate in the water column over bottom structure, and jigging is often a successful method of fishing near reefs. Live bait is also effective on or near reefs. Amberjack are noted strong, deep fighters. Although they do not normally take to the air, they have great strength and can raise havoc with light tackle. For this reason, medium to heavy spinning on casting rods is recommended. Number 4/0 to 5/0 hooks with an 80-pound monofilament leader should be used.
preserving, dressing and preparing

The quality of your catch will be only as good as the way it was handled. Poorly handled fish will not last as long and will taste inferior to fish properly maintained. Temperature is the key. The lower the temperature at which the amberjack is kept immediately after catching, the longer it can be maintained as fresh and the less strong it will taste, because spoilage is directly related to temperature.

When fishing on warm days, you should be prepared with a cooler and an adequate supply of ice. Fish stay fresher when they are handled as little as possible. Dressing isn't necessary for small to medium sized fish. But for large fish, such as amberjack, it is recommended that you bleed and dress the fish. Once the fish has been gutted and bled, the body cavity should be packed with ice and the entire fish smothered in ice. This allows for a quicker reduction of temperature in the fish's core. Properly maintained fish can be kept fresh for up to 7 days and safely stored in the freezer for 3 to 6 months.

Amberjack, like many other species of large fish, can have trypanorhynch cha tapeworms, which are concentrated in the tail section of the meat. This type of parasite is usually associated with cartilaginous fish and cannot be transmitted to humans. The affected area is readily visible. Make a standard fillet cut from behind the operculum (gill cover) toward the tail and turn the fillet over. The tapeworms are white and will be located in the tail quarter of the fish. The contaminated area will have a red discoloration, contrasting with the whitish color of the non-infested area. Although there is no danger imposed by eating this part of the fish, most people prefer to cut this section off and discard it. The part remaining, which can be significant in size, is firm, light meat and moderate in taste. It is excellent baked, charcoaled, or broiled and basted with a variety of seafood sauces. Amberjack is also excellent smoked.
Baked Amberjack with Mushrooms

2 pounds amberjack steaks or other fish steaks, fresh or frozen
2/3 cup thinly sliced onion
1 1/2 cups chopped fresh or canned, drained mushrooms
1/2 cup chopped tomato
1/4 cup chopped green pepper
1/2 cup chopped parsley
3 tablespoons chopped pimiento
1/2 cup dry white wine
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon dill weed
1/8 teaspoon pepper
lemon wedges

Thaw frozen steaks. Cut into serving-size portions. Arrange onion in bottom of a greased baking dish, 12x8x2". Place fish on top of onion. Combine remaining vegetables and spread over top of fish. Combine wine, lemon juice, and seasonings. Pour over vegetables. Bake in a moderate oven, 350° F., for 25 to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Sprinkle with paprika. Serve with lemon wedges. Serves 6.

Baked Amberjack

2 pounds fish fillets or steaks
1 teaspoon salt
dash pepper
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon grated onion
4 tablespoons melted butter
paprika

Cut fish into serving-size portions. Sprinkle both sides with salt and pepper. Add the lemon juice and onion to the melted fat. Dip each piece of fish into this mixture and place in a greased baking pan. Pour the rest of the fat over the fish. Bake in moderate oven for 25 to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Sprinkle with paprika. Serves 6.
Smoked Amberjack

6 pounds amberjack fillets  
1 cup salt  
1 gallon water  
\( \frac{1}{4} \) cup peanut or salad oil

Wash fillets thoroughly, particularly the body cavity. Combine salt and water. Stir until well dissolved. Soak fish in brine for 30 minutes.

To smoke fish, use a charcoal fire in a portable barbecue with hood or lid that closes to make a smoker. Soak 1 pound of hickory chips or sawdust in 2 quarts water. Let charcoal fire burn down to a low, even heat. Place \( \frac{1}{3} \) of the wet chips on the charcoal.

Rinse fish in cold water. Place fish, skin down, on well-greased barbecue grill over the smoking fire. Place cover over grill. Smoke for 1\( \frac{1}{2} \) hours, adding remaining wet chips or sawdust at 15 minute intervals to keep the fire smoking.

Increase the temperature by adding more charcoal to the fire and opening the draft. Brush fish sparingly with oil. Cover and cook for 15 minutes. Brush again with oil and continue cooking for 10 minutes or until fish is lightly browned. Serves 6.

For broiling, try this basting sauce

Maitre D'Hotel Butter

\( \frac{1}{2} \) cup butter or margarine  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
dash cayenne pepper  
1 tablespoon minced parsley  
\( \frac{1}{2} \) teaspoon salt

To serve hot: Melt butter; add rest of ingredients. Spread on piping-hot broiled fish. Makes 4 servings.

To serve cold: Work softened butter until creamy. Gradually stir in lemon juice, then rest of ingredients.

Fine herb butter. Substitute 3 tablespoons white wine for lemon juice; stir in 2 tablespoons minced chives and 1 teaspoon minced fresh dill.
This brochure reflects an ongoing research and communication effort by university scientists, marine advisory personnel, state and federal government agencies, and sport fishermen to develop new, exciting dimensions to recreational fishing, and to make the most of the ocean's bounty. The information presented here is founded on the premise that the bases for decision-making and resource development must originate within the sportfishing community, since sport fishermen are the true experts on the recreational fishing experience.

Sources:

For further information on other underutilized fish caught by recreational fishermen contact the UNC Sea Grant College Program, Box 8605, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-8605

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