

# The New York Times

## SHAD AND SHAD ROE, SEASONAL DELIGHTS

By MOIRA HODGSON

Published: March 25, 1981

The shad, wrote the French author Grimod de la Reyniere, "reclines on its bed of sorrel like a beauty on the ottoman of her boudoir." This sweet delicate, white-fleshed fish with its spectacular roe is now at the height of the season.

Shad has wire-like bones, as in a 19th-century corset. They are so tiny and persistent that tweezers are sometimes needed to remove them. Because of this, the French traditionally serve shad with a puree of sorrel. As the author Waverley Root points out, the "oxalic acid softens and indeed seems all but to dissolve the bones, so that you eat them embedded in the flesh without being aware of their presence."

Sorrel is extremely expensive at the moment (\$10 a pound at Balducci's, Avenue of the Americas and Ninth Street) but will be going down in price. A small amount of puree, however, using only about 1/4 pound of leaves, can be extended with heavy cream. Shad is also good with fresh tomato sauce or *beurre blanc*.

The fish is a member of the herring family and lives both in fresh and salt water. Out of season shad is scrawny and thin, but in season it is plump and succulent. It is sold boned in fish markets such as De Martino's, Eighth Avenue at 16th Street.

At the Oyster Bar in Grand Central Terminal both shad and roe are on the menu, served broiled with lemon wedges and bacon. "The fish started running about a month ago and will continue into May," said George Morfogen, fish buyer for the restaurant.

"Florida shad is the first to run," he said. "They go up the river to spawn when the water starts to get warm. As the rivers get progressively warmer the shad starts spawning up the coast, to Georgia, then to the Carolinas, Virginia, Delaware, all the way to the Hudson and up the Connecticut River. The fish come in from the sea, spawn and go home. The young fish grow in the river and then go out to sea."

Shad on the current market comes mostly from Virginia and from Carolinas. It is caught in nets fastened to poles driven into bottom of the river. These nets are set four to six feet above the bottom and the top of the river so only a portion of shad is caught and the others can go through. "Otherwise you would

decimate the species," Mr. Morfogen explained. During the 19th century more than 4.5 million pounds a year were fished from the Hudson alone, compared with an estimated 100,000 today.

The roe is good sauteed or broiled in butter and served with bacon - a Victorian breakfast dish still served in Britain today. In the 1880's shad were so common that H.L. Mencken wrote of his mother's outrage at being charged extra for the roe, which the fishmonger used to give away free with the fish.

The shad is a sensitive fish. An Englishman, Francis Day, wrote in 1880 that in Germany it was "terrified at storms and troubled waters, delighting in quiet and musical sounds." "Therefore," he said, "to the nets are fastened bows of wood, to which are suspended a number of small bells which chime in harmony together on the nets being moved: The fish are thought to be thus attracted to their destruction, and as long as the alluring sounds continue they cease all efforts at escape."

# SHAD: HARD TO BONE BUT WELL WORTH IT

By CRAIG CLAIBORNE

Published: March 24, 1982

NOW that the season for shad is with us, perhaps it's time that we paid homage to the employee of a New York fishmonger who devised a technique some years ago for boning that delicious fish. Shad has what may be the most elaborate bone structure of any fish. Because of the maddening intricacy, it was looked upon as "trash" fish slightly more than 50 years ago.

In 1927, so the story goes, one of the customers of a now-defunct concern called J.H. Michaels was the investment banking firm of J.P. Morgan. A devotee of food at the House of Morgan offered a reward to anyone at the fishmonger's who could devise a technique for boning shad. An ambitious employee set about the task with tweezers, scissors and knives and eventually came up with something. It took Recipes are on page C14. years to perfect; even today relatively few fish handlers in Manhattan can master it.

The availability of shad in this country usually begins early in February in the rivers around Florida. The fish travels up the Altamaha and Ogeechee Rivers in Georgia, through the waters of the Carolinas, then the Chesapeake and the Delaware and, eventually, it is found in some unpolluted sections of the Hudson (shad will neither swim nor spawn in polluted waters for lack of oxygen). The season ends in Connecticut near the end of May.

Shad was much appreciated by American Indians long before the arrival of Europeans. It was they who conceived the notion of planked shad, in which the cleaned fish is nailed to a plank and cooked for hours before an open fire. The modern version of this method is to nail the boned fillets of fish, along with slices of bacon, onto a plank that is set at a slight angle before a long, slow-burning charcoal fire; it usually takes about half an hour to cook the fish.

One of the most interesting shad recipes Pierre Franey and I have tested came to us from the Seafood Marketing Authority in Annapolis, Md. For years I had heard of a technique for preparing a whole unboned shad, in which the fish is baked until the bones are dissolved. The fish is steamed, tightly covered, for five hours in the oven.

The flavor and texture of shad and shad roe make them not only delectable but incredibly versatile. There are those who contend - and understandably so - that the flavor of either is so abundantly good that neither should be served with an elaborate sauce. And both the fillets and the roe can be teamed at one meal.

Over the years we have discovered some interesting versions of both made with sauces. One of the best preparations for shad roe is to be found at times on the menu of La Caravelle in Manhattan, listed as shad roe "aux quatre oeufs": a sauce, a beurre blanc or white butter sauce, containing chopped hard-cooked

eggs, red salmon roe and black caviar is spooned over the hot shad roe, which has been braised in a little white wine.

One of the simplest and best recipes (it is not to be considered for those on a diet) is that of Ann Seranne, the cookbook author. She melts enough butter in a skillet to contain the roe and literally poaches it, turning once, until done. Even when served without the butter "sauce" but with lemon wedges and chopped parsley, it is most tempting to the palate.