

Fish Meuniere with Browned Butter and Lemon

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This simple French restaurant classic deserves a place in the repertoire of any good home cook. . . . Or does it?

The Problem: Fish meunière typically features pale, soggy fillets in pools of greasy sauce--that is, if the fish doesn't stick to the pan or fall apart as it is plated.

The Goal: Perfectly cooked fillets that are delicately crisp and golden brown on the outside and moist and flavorful on the inside, napped in buttery yet light sauce. What could be simpler, more delicious, or better suited to a Tuesday-night dinner?

The Solution: Whole Dover sole is the most authentic choice, but it's also hard to come by and prohibitively expensive; instead, use any filleted white flatfish carried by the local fishmonger. The type of fish matters less than its freshness and the thickness of the fillet. Dry the fillets, then season with salt and pepper and allow to sit for 5 minutes, then dredge in flour (no need for eggs and bread crumbs). Pan-fry in a nonstick skillet with a mixture of oil and butter. Brown the butter in a stainless steel skillet, season with lemon juice, then pour over the fish.

Serves 4

Try to purchase fillets that are of similar size, and avoid those that weigh less than 5 ounces because they will cook too quickly. A nonstick skillet ensures that the fillets will release from the pan, but for the sauce a traditional skillet is preferable because its light-colored surface will allow you to monitor the color of the butter as it browns.

Ingredients

Fish

1/2 cup unbleached all-purpose flour

4 sole fillets or flounder fillets, each 5 to 6 ounces and 3/8 inch thick, patted dry with paper towels

Table salt and ground black pepper

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 2 pieces

Browned Butter

4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces

1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves

1 1/2 tablespoons lemon juice from 1 lemon

1 lemon, cut in wedges for serving

Method

1. FOR THE FISH

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position, set 4 heatproof dinner plates on rack, and heat oven to 200 degrees. Place flour in large baking dish. Season both sides of each fillet generously with salt and pepper; let stand until fillets are glistening with moisture, about 5 minutes. Coat both sides of fillets with flour, shake off excess, and place in single layer on baking sheet. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until shimmering, then add 1 tablespoon butter and swirl to coat pan bottom; when foaming subsides, carefully place 2 fillets in skillet, bone-side down. Immediately reduce heat to medium-high and cook, without moving fish, until edges of fillets are opaque and bottom is golden brown, about 3 minutes. Using 2 spatulas, gently flip fillets (see illustration below) and cook on second side until thickest part of fillet easily separates into flakes when toothpick is inserted, about 2 minutes longer. Transfer fillets, one to each heated dinner plate, keeping bone-side up, and return plates to oven. Wipe out skillet and repeat with remaining 1 tablespoon each oil and butter and remaining fish fillets.

2. FOR THE BROWNED BUTTER

Heat butter in 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat until butter melts, 1 to 1 1/2 minutes. Continue to cook, swirling pan constantly, until butter is golden brown and has nutty aroma, 1 to 1 1/2 minutes; remove skillet from heat. Remove plates from oven and sprinkle fillets with parsley. Add lemon juice to browned butter and season to taste with salt; spoon sauce over fish and serve immediately with lemon wedges.