

Chef's Corner: Pan-Fried Fish Roe Poppers

JUNE 2021

This nutrition-packed Fish Roe recipe is quick, easy, and makes a great appetizer, snack, or meal any time of the day or night!



Fresh Pan-Fried Sea Mullet Roe with Lemon and Tabasco!

Waste not, want not continues to be my theme as I explore the ethical utilization of all edible morsels from our catch or harvest. Roe is no exception and is an ethereal “*Super Food*” packed with protein, essential fats, vitamins, and minerals.

Fish Roe is an excellent source of Omega-3 Fatty Acids and at between 120-170 Calories per 3-ounce serving, it packs a powerful nutritional punch and substantial value based on recommended daily allowances:

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|-----------------|------|--------------|----|
| • Vitamin B-12: | 142% | • Vitamin A: | 5% |
| • Vitamin D: | 103% | • Potassium: | 5% |
| • Protein: | 38% | • Magnesium: | 4% |
| • Vitamin C: | 23% | • Iron: | 3% |
| • Vitamin B-6: | 5% | • Calcium: | 2% |

If that's not enough incentive to salvage and prepare this delectable "by product" of our catch, fresh Roe is also rich, piquant, and savory for those that make the effort to explore its culinary diversity!

Roe is also high in cholesterol, but its nutritional profile offers potential *benefits* for cholesterol levels. All but 1.5 g of the 7 g of fat in each 3-oz. serving is unsaturated, rather than saturated or trans-fat, which are unhealthy fats. This is fantastic given its massive nutritional benefits, so let's explore this *Super Food* candidate in more detail!

In our restaurant years, my father always ordered fresh fish "on-the-hoof" to ensure we got the most value per pound during the processing stages while ensuring our patrons received only the freshest catch available, and I was the "lucky" processor!



Fried Roe Poppers!

Whether it was large Grey Trout, Flounder, Mahi, and Striped Bass, or Panfish such as Pompano, Spots, Croakers, and Kingfish, I saved the Roe from every fish I cleaned or filleted. These small delicacies became family meals back in the day, and for our most learned customers, we served "off the board" specials of fried Roe *a la carte* or as an addition to our many fried and broiled seafood platter combos. They would simply ask their server for "a side of roe," and it was so!

To this day, I save even the smallest sets of Roe pulled from Kingfish, Spanish Mackerel, Bluefish, Spots, Croakers, and Smooth Puffers as they find their way into my cooler each spring. The picture above right, for example, includes small sets of Roe pulled from a day's catch of Blues, Kingfish, Spanish, and a Puffer.

What a GREAT appetizer!!

Virtually all fish are full of Roe in the spring and early summer, but most folks simply don't want to use it.

Unfortunately, they discard the Roe with the carcasses, typically because they are unfamiliar with anything but Shad Roe.

They truly do not know what they are missing, so hopefully, this article will trigger an enlightenment that propels this up the list of must-have Super Foods!



A typical May morning catch in the OBX surf!



Fresh fillets and sweet sets of roe for the skillet!

Whether it is big or small, bright red or pale yellow, fish Roe is a culinary gift of spring and a nutritional power-pack. So have an open mind, and "Just Say Yes" the next time you're asked if you want to keep that Roe.

Now, on with this month's featured recipe!

Fried Fish Roe Poppers

Pictured at right is my 2020 citation Sea Mullet which produced a 2-ounce set of Roe for the skillet. It weighed-in at 1 lb 9 oz, so that saturated 2-oz Roe sack literally qualified it as a citation! No way was I wasting that succulent set of Roe!

Ingredients:

*12 or more sets of fresh Sea Mullet Roe (other types of roe work too!)

1 cup House Autry's Seafood Breading (or your favorite breading!)

1 egg, beaten

¼-cup milk

2-4 tablespoons of oil (bacon grease, olive oil, butter, canola, etc. - can also use a deep-fat fryer if preferred)

Fresh lemon, halved

Tabasco sauce (optional)

***NOTE:** I used 2 dozen sets of Sea Mullet roe in this instance, but virtually any roe is excellent, including Sea Trout, Spanish Mackerel, Southern Puffers, Bluefish, Spot, Sand Perch, Croaker, etc. Roe from freshwater panfish is excellent, too.



Author with a Fat Roe-Filled Citation Sea Mullet!

Directions:

Step 1: Carefully remove the Roe as you fillet the fish!

Whatever Roe you do not plan to use right away should be par-frozen to maintain its shape, then vacuum-sealed for the freezer. It maintains its shape and freezes well when processed this way to ensure it can be enjoyed all summer!



Two Dozen sets of roe removed from a spring 2020 catch of Sea Mullet, Bluefish, Sand Perch, Spot, and Smooth Dogfish!

Step 2: Prepare the Roe for the Fryer!

Lightly coat each set of Roe in the breading mix.

Combine the egg and milk in a small bowl and beat into an egg wash.

Dip the Row in the egg wash and return to the breading for a heartier coating.

Use a toothpick to perforate each egg sack with 2 or 3 “vents” per sack (helps prevent it from popping in the skillet)



Fresh Sea Mullet Roe!



Initial “dusting” of the Roe.



Note the perforations in each sack.

Step 3: Pan-frying the Roe!

Heat oil to at least 375 degrees in your favorite pan-frying skillet (or deep-fat fryer). You want it hot for a quick sear.

Add the Roe and fry until golden on each side but be careful not overcook it – it’s best when the moisture is retained!

Remove the Roe Poppers onto paper towel and serve with lemon and Tabasco!



Lightly pan-fry each side til golden.



The first batch of tasty morsels!



Golden fried Roe ready to serve!

Tips:

- Perforating the roe sacks with a toothpick helps avoid excessive splatter
- Use a splatter screen over the skillet just in case
- Add the largest sets of roe to the skillet first since they take longer to cook

Additional Ways to Enjoy Fresh or Prepared Fish Roe

I have replicated the above recipe with some variations for years, and it works for all kinds of Roe and ranging in size from less than an ounce to 5 or 6 ounces. But there are so many other ways to enjoy small or large sets of Roe, I had to list a few here – some of which may appear in future editions of the Chef’s Corner!

Here’s a list of more great dishes which feature this magnificent Super Food:

- Striped Bass Roe with Fresh Herbs
- Pan-Fried Mahi Roe
- Fish Egg Fritters
- Baked Whole Shad with Roe (an old-time Maryland tradition!)
- Fried Bluegill Eggs
- Spicy Fried Fish Egg Masala
- Fish Egg Fritters Curry
- Fish Eggs Benedict
- Taramasalata – I would shame my heritage if I didn’t list this Grecian masterpiece!



Striper Roe with Fresh Herbs!

These are but a few of the recipes I have discovered and tried, and all are exceptional. The list indeed goes on!

The imagination is the limit, and as you learn how to master the art of preparing fresh Roe, you will come to appreciate all of the subtle nuances of each species-derived set – the textures and flavors will take you away to generations past when these delicacies provided crucial nutrition and were revered vice discarded to waste away with the carcasses.



Spanish Mackerel Roe with Bacon!



Taramasalata – a Greek Staple!



Pan-fried Mahi Roe!

So, the next time you catch a fat spring fish, look for those precious sets of Roe, and treat them with as much or more care as the rest of the catch – you will not be disappointed!

Contributed by: CHAC member John Germanos, aka “The Instinctive Chef,” and inspired by generations past.

