

# ***Florida Food Fare***

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## **Catfish**

**Description:** There are several species of edible catfish available in Florida depending upon the waters in which they are caught. The main species available are: Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*), Blue Catfish, (*Ictalurus furcatus*), White Catfish (*Ictalurus catus*), Yellow Bullhead (*Ameiurus natalis*), Brown Bullhead (*Ictalurus nebulosus*), and the Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*). All of these are good eating fish when taken from clean water. Catfish are bottom feeders (feeding from the floor of the surface in which they live) and live in a variety of water conditions. The Channel and Blue catfish are more apt to be found in cleaner waters. In Florida, they are found statewide in rivers and streams and in slightly brackish coastal waters. The other species – White Catfish, Yellow and Brown Bullheads and Flatheads – will tolerate siltier bottoms or mud flats and are often known as "mud cats." When caught from these dirtier waters they are not as tasty and tend to contain more pollutants, thus these catfish are usually considered inedible or not recommended for eating.

Most of the catfish purchased in the markets today is actually "farm-raised." Channel catfish farming is the fastest growing segment of the aquaculture industry in the United States. Expansion of this industry over the past two decades has been phenomenal and catfish is now the most widely cultured food fish in this country. Channel catfish are produced from 188,380 acres of catfish ponds in Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas and Louisiana with an annual yield of over 470 million pounds. Farm-raised catfish are fed a puffed, high-protein floating food pellet (a mixture of soybeans, corn, wheat, vitamins and minerals). This specially formulated feed is one of the reasons for the catfish's subtle taste and lack of "fishy" odor. The farm raising of catfish also makes this fish now available in the markets year round.

**Nutritional Value:** Approximate nutritional values for 4 ounces (114 grams) of raw, edible catfish, considered a serving size, are: 110 calories with 25 calories from fat; 3 gm total fat; 0.5 gm saturated fat; 60 mg cholesterol; 70 mg sodium; 0 gm carbohydrate; 21 gm protein; 6% Daily Value of calcium; and 4% Daily Value of iron.

**Selection and Care:** Fresh catfish should be refrigerated at 32-38 degrees F. and used within two days. To freeze, wrap tightly to prevent freezer burn, write date on package and store at 0 degrees F. Properly frozen, farm-raised catfish will retain excellent product quality for two to four months. Thaw in the refrigerator or under cold running water.

### Recipes:

#### Classic Fried Catfish

3/4 cup yellow cornmeal	1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 cup all-purpose flour	4 catfish fillets
2 teaspoons salt	canola oil
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper	

For garnish: Sliced tomato and parsley sprigs.

Combine cornmeal, flour, salt, cayenne pepper and garlic powder. Coat farm-raised catfish with mixture, shaking off excess.

Fill deep pot or 12-inch skillet half full with vegetable oil. Heat to 350 degrees F. Add catfish in single layer, and fry until golden brown, about 5 - 6 minutes, depending on size. Remove and drain on paper towels. Serves 4.

#### Grilled Catfish Salad with Wild Greens

2 catfish fillets, cut into 1" thick strips	2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
1/4 pound portobello mushrooms, thickly sliced	1 small shallot, finely chopped
1/4 cup olive oil	1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon fresh tarragon, chopped or 1 teaspoon dried tarragon	4 cups baby salad greens, washed and and torn into bite-size pieces

Place catfish fillet strips and mushrooms in a shallow dish. Mix olive oil, vinegar, tarragon, shallot, salt and pepper in a small bowl using a wire whisk until well blended. Pour two-thirds of the marinade over the catfish and mushrooms. Cover dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes to marinate. Reserve remaining marinade to use as salad dressing.

Prepare a grill or preheat the broiler. Place catfish strips and mushrooms on an oiled grill rack or broiler pan rack. Grill or broil 4 inches from the heat source for 2 or 3 minutes on each side or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Refrigerate until room temperature or chilled. Toss salad greens, mushrooms and reserved marinade in a large bowl. Top with grilled catfish. Serves 4.

### **Spanish Catfish Paella**

2 cups chicken broth	2 cups converted rice or yellow rice,
2 cups water	uncooked
1/2 teaspoon saffron	2 teaspoons salt
1/2 pound chorizo, thinly sliced*	1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil	2 catfish fillets, cut into 1 1/2 inch cubes
1 medium onion, chopped	1 pound medium shrimps, shelled and
2 cloves garlic, minced	deveined
2 green or red bell peppers, cut into	1 pound fresh mussels, well scrubbed
strips	1 9-ounces package frozen artichoke
6 sun-dried tomatoes or 2 medium	hearts,
fresh tomatoes, chopped	1 cup frozen green peas, thawed

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Mix chicken stock, water and saffron in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Remove from heat. Brown sausages in a large, oven-proof skillet over medium heat, turning sausage once. Using a slotted spoon, remove sausage from the pan and set aside. Add olive oil to skillet and heat. Add onion and sauté until translucent. Stir in garlic, bell peppers, tomatoes and rice, tossing to coat with oil. Add chicken stock mixture, salt, cayenne pepper and sausage and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover with a tight-fitting lid or aluminum foil and simmer for 10 minutes. Uncover and remove from heat. Arrange catfish fillet pieces, shrimp, mussels and artichokes over cooked rice, pushing them down into it. Sprinkle peas over top and cover. Place skillet in oven and bake for 20 minutes or until catfish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Serves 8.

\*Note: Chorizo is a spicy Spanish sausage. It can be omitted from the recipe, but increase the amount of olive oil to 1/4 cup.

### **Grilled Smoked Catfish with Horseradish Cream For the Horseradish Cream:**

1 cup fat free half and half	1 teaspoon chopped fresh dill
2 tablespoons lite sour cream	1 teaspoon lemon juice

1/2 cup prepared horseradish, drained  
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

1 teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon pepper

**For the Smoked Catfish:**

2 cups water

1 cup lemon juice

5 cloves garlic, sliced

4 shallots, sliced

2 tablespoons salt

2 tablespoons sugar

6 large catfish fillets

**To prepare horseradish cream:** mix cream, sour cream, horseradish, mustard, dill, lemon juice, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Let come to room temperature before serving. Best if made ahead to let flavors blend and will keep three weeks refrigerated.

**To prepare smoked catfish:** mix water, lemon juice, garlic, shallots, salt, sugar and dill in a small bowl. Place catfish fillets in a shallow dish and pour marinade over them. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 4 to 5 hours to marinate. Prepare charcoal for grilling and let fire burn until the coals are medium to low heat (250 degrees F. to 300 degrees F. on a barbecue thermometer or you can hold your hand palm down about 5 inches above coals for 5 seconds before removing it). Place catfish on an oiled grill rack over the coals. Cover grill and cook for 25 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Place fillets on serving plates and spoon horseradish cream over the top.

There are hundreds of catfish recipes available on the Internet from The Catfish Institute at: <http://www.catfishinstitute.com>