

Something to mullet over

In the June edition of our regular seasonal food guide, **DORY MASRI**, head chef at Norwich's popular Last Wine Bar, gets fishy with an underrated fishmonger's favourite.

LAST
Wine Bar & Restaurant

June is when the sun starts shining, the tennis players start making a racquet, and everyone's thoughts turn to strawberries. Delicious as English strawberries are at this time of the year, I am turning to another food which is just coming into season, and which you might not know so well – the grey mullet.

Grey mullet is much underrated – and therefore very good value. You are probably more likely to have tasted red mullet, but grey mullet bears no relation to this – it's more like a cousin of the ever-popular sea bass.

The fish can be as much as 18 inches long, weighting anything up to 5kg (10lb); but you will mostly find them around 1kg. It needs to be handled with care, as it bruises very easily. This is a fish to buy as close to the time of eating as possible. It is not a good keeper; after 72 hours, even on ice, it becomes inedible. So freshness is the key. You will find it frozen, but as with all fish, freshly-caught, bright-eyed, glistening fish is what you are after.

Grey mullet are found all around the British coast, as well as in



estuaries. They are a really tasty fish, best cooked whole. With firm, white, oily flesh, it's an ideal fish for the barbecue. It can also be baked, steamed or roasted, and when cooked whole, makes a great centrepiece for the table.

One characteristic of this fish is that it has a very long digestive system, so when it is gutted there is a big cavity, ideal for stuffing with fennel, mushrooms, garlic or other strongly-flavoured herbs, such as rosemary or thyme. One recipe from northern France even sees the

fish stuffed with minced veal forcemeat.

Incidentally, grey mullet roe (eggs) are the original ingredient of taramasalata, that delicious Greek dip which is now more commonly made with cod roe.

Some people are very unadventurous when it comes to fish, sticking to tried and tested favourites such as cod and haddock. But I would urge you to try the grey mullet this month – you will be pleasantly surprised. If you can't find it at the supermarket, why not

try your local fishmonger, who will not only prepare the fish for you, but give you some advice on how to cook it – or just try one of my recipes below.

■ **Next month: Aubergines**

What's In Season

■ **Fruit/vegetables:** Strawberries, gooseberries, broad beans, peas, apricots

■ **Meat/fish:** Sardines, sea bass, sea trout, wood pigeon

Pan Fried Fillet Of Grey Mullet With Saffron Potato, Red Onion And Fresh Chilli. Served With Salsa Verde.

Serves 4

1.5kg of grey mullet (one or two fish), filleted (ask your fishmonger to do this)
500g potatoes, peeled
2 red onions, sliced
3 fresh chillis, sliced
A pinch of saffron
300ml chicken stock
Juice of 1 lemon
100g butter

For the salsa verde
50g parsley
50g basil
50g tarragon
50g mint
50g oregano
50g tinned anchovies
20g capers
2 shallots finely chopped
2 cloves of garlic
Juice of 1 lemon
100ml extra virgin olive oil.



■ Cut the potatoes into disks about 1cm thick. Lay the slices in a baking dish with layers of sliced onion and chilli in between.

■ Bring the stock and the saffron to the boil. Season and pour over the potatoes. Scatter the butter on the top and bake in the oven at 160°C/325°F for 45 minutes, or until the potatoes are soft.

■ Fry the grey mullet fillets in a pan skin side down until crispy, then turn over and put them on the top of the potato dish to finish off ready to be served.

■ To make the salsa verde, chop all the herbs, the shallots, the garlic and the anchovies and mix together. Add the capers, lemon juice and the oil. Mix thoroughly and season with just pepper, as the anchovies could be salty. Serve in a bowl separately.

Tempura Grey Mullet With Root Vegetable Slaw And Basil Aioli

Serves 4

350g of grey mullet fillets

For the slaw
2 carrots
celeriac
3 turnips
1 cooked beetroot
onion
2tbsp good quality mayonnaise
Juice of one lemon

For the batter
250 g plain flour
1tbsp baking powder
1tbsp smoked paprika
250ml sparkling water
1 litre of rapeseed oil, for frying

For the aioli
A good dollop of good quality mayonnaise
2 gloves of garlic, finely chopped
A few springs of fresh basil
Juice of lemon

■ To make the slaw, peel and grate the vegetables in a bowl. Add the mayonnaise and lemon juice. Mix together. Season with salt and pepper.

■ Mix the dry ingredients for the batter and add the sparkling water slowly while whisking, to avoid any lumps. You can always pass the batter through a fine sieve if you find it lumpy. Season.

■ Heat the oil for frying up to 200°C. Dip the fish in the batter and then dip slowly in the hot oil. Cook for 3-4 minutes. Drain on kitchen paper.

■ Mix all the ingredients for the aioli together and season with salt and pepper. Arrange the fish, the slaw and aioli on a plate and serve.

