

CONGER

Conger eel are large, and therefore rather off-putting to some cooks. But, they are fierce beasts and put up a good fight and are therefore popular with anglers, so it is a pity not to make use of the large amount of firm white fishy flesh! It can be used to make excellent fish pie and will make a substantial fish

soup. Conger can also be baked or roasted and accompanied with a strong-flavoured sauce made with, say, mushrooms or onions. Because it is bony the middle cuts are best to use and you should allow 6 oz (175g) on the bone, per person. These recipes are also suitable for very large Pollack.

Recipe no.1

FISH KEBABS WITH PASTIS MAYONNAISE

Serves 4 Comes with the added bonus of being a recipe for the barbecue.
Alternatively these kebabs can be cooked under the grill

1lb (450g) conger fillet
Spring of thyme
Spring of fennel
6 bayleaves
2 fl. oz (50ml) olive oil

Juice of quarter of a lemon
4 tomatoes
1 large onion
4 oz. (120g) bacon
salt ad black pepper

For the Pastis mayonnaise:

10 fl. oz (250ml) mayonnaise (good quality readymade or home made with olive oil)

1 fl. oz. (25ml) pastis (Ricard or Pernod)
1 teaspoon (5 ml) chopped fennel.

Cut the conger into 1" (2.5 cm) cubes. Pull the thyme leaves off the sprig and chop the fennel. Cut each bayleaf into three pieces. Place herbs in a bowl with the fish and add the oil and lemon juice. Stir around and leave to marinate for at least an hour before cooking. Cut the tomatoes and onion into wedges. Remove the rind from the bacon and cut it into 1" (2.5cm) pieces. Thread four skewers with the conger, pieces of bayleaf, bacon, tomato and onion. Chill until ready to cook. Mix the pastis mayonnaise ingredients. To cook the kebabs, make sure that the flames have died down on the barbecue. Brush kebabs with some of the marinade and grill them for about 7 minutes, turning occasionally. Throw some dried fennel on to the fire for extra flavour. Season with salt and pepper. Serve with the mayonnaise, a green salad and some pitta bread.

Recipe no.2

JERSEY CONGER SOUP

Serves 6-8

1 kg (2 1/4 lb) piece of conger eel
1/4 green cabbage, shredded
2 carrots, diced
300g (11oz) small new potatoes, halved
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1.15 litres (2 pints) full cream milk
30g (1oz) plain flour

salt and pepper
1.7 litres (3 pints) water
1 large onion, chopped
110g (4oz) shelled fresh peas, or frozen peas
2 fresh thyme sprigs
300g (1oz) butter
150ml (1/4pint) double cream

Chop the conger eel into large chunks and rinse. Put into a saucepan with the water and bring to the boil. Simmer for 40 minutes, skimming off any scum that rises to the top. Strain off the liquid and put to one side. Remove the skin of the conger and pick off the edible flesh left on the bones. Keep the flesh and throw away the skin and bones. Return the liquid to the cleaned saucepan and add the vegetables plus the herbs and salt and pepper. Simmer until the vegetables are tender then add milk to the pan and bring back to the boil. Mash the butter with the flour to form a paste and dot little bits of the paste into the soup and stir until dissolved. Return the fish to the pan and simmer gently for 5 minutes until lightly thickened then stir in the cream and taste to adjust seasoning. (It needs a fair bit of salt to bring out the flavour of the fish). Scatter some more chopped parsley on the top and serve.

Recipe no.3**MOROCCAN CONGER**

Serves 4-6

1-1.5kg (2 1/2 - 3lb) conger eel cut into 6 pieces.
500g (1lb 2oz) carrots, thinly sliced
500g (1lb 2oz) red onions, halved and sliced into thin semi-circles
250g (9oz) seedless raisins
2 teaspoons ground cumin
Generous pinch of saffron strands

4 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander
110ml (4 fl. oz) sunflower oil
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
5 garlic cloves, chopped
900ml (1 1/2pints) water
Salt

Preheat the oven to 200°C/400/Gas Mark 6. Drop the fish into boiling water and let it simmer for 4 minutes then lift out and scrape off the skin with a thin-bladed knife. Remove the large central bones and as many smaller bones as you can. Make a bed of carrots in a lightly oiled flameproof baking dish. Place the conger on the top and then strew over the onions and raisins. Mix the pepper, cumin, cinnamon, saffron and some salt and sprinkle over, then scatter on the garlic and half the coriander. Add the water and oil, cover and bake for an hour, stirring occasionally. Transfer to the hob and boil the sauce for about 15 minutes to give a thick, stewy consistency. Taste and adjust the seasoning, scatter with the remaining coriander and serve.

Recipe no.4**CONGER CASSOULET**

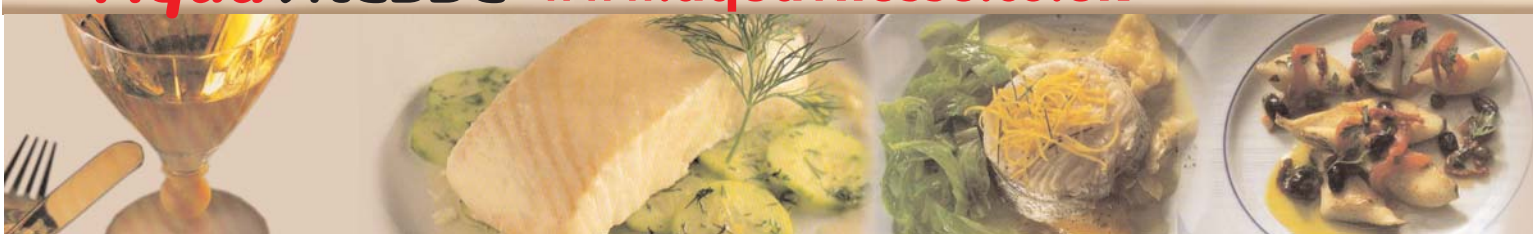
Serves 4

450g (1lb) dried haricot beans
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
6 cloves garlic, chopped
3 Toulouse sausages cut into slices
200g (7 oz) tin chopped tomatoes
1/2 red chilli, seeded and chopped
150 ml (5 fl. oz) extra virgin olive oil

salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon salt
4 slices of fresh white bread
50g (2 oz) smoked ham, sliced and cut into 1/2" (1cm) strips
600ml (1 pint) chicken stock
450 (1lb) conger eel fillet, skinned, boned and cut into 1" (2.5cm) cubes

Soak the beans for 8 hours and drain, then put in pan, add enough water to cover generously and simmer for 25 minutes. Add salt and simmer for further 25 minutes until nearly tender. Preheat the oven to 180°C/350° F/Gas Mark 4. Place parsley, white bread and half the garlic in a food processor and process to a breadcrumb mixture. Season with salt and pepper, add remaining ingredients [except 65ml (2 fl. oz) of the oil and the salt and pepper] to the pan. Simmer for 20 minutes then season with black pepper. Place the contents of the pan in a deep ovenproof pot, preferably earthenware. Pour over the rest of the olive oil and sprinkle with the breadcrumb mixture. Bake in the oven for about 1 hour pushing the breadcrumbs down into the cassoulet three or four times during the baking to build up a crust. Serve with a lightly dressed green salad.

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BASS

To me the bass is not only the most enjoyable sea fish to catch but it is also the best to eat.

Throughout the summer months we catch some of the best bass on the South Coast, with many fish in double figures, (look out for bass trips on the Aquavitesse web site).

With such a good, slightly oily flavour bass is one of the easiest fish to cook, you really don't need to "fancy it up" too much to produce a good dish.

Smaller bass* are excellent grilled whole. Just put them under the grill with their skin and scales still on, by doing this the skin turns a crispy brown but protects the flesh from burning and keeps the moisture and flavour in.

When cooked the skin can easily be removed. Just serve with seasonal veg and new potatoes tossed in butter, lemon, watercress and parsley to garnish.

As bass is very similar in taste and texture to sea bream you could use any of the recipes listed for bream.

*NFSA Size limit for bass is 41cm (16")

Recipe no.1

GRILLED BASS WITH ASPARAGUS

Serves 4

1 bass weighing about 3-4lb, or if you have a larger fish then you could use 4 1/2-3/4 lb scalled fillets

A little melted butter for brushing

About 20 Asparagus spears

Salt and pepper

For the Beurre Blanc

50g (2oz) shallots or onions, finely chopped

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

4 tablespoons dry white wine

6 tablespoons water or fish stock

2 tablespoons double cream

175g (6 oz) unsalted butter, cut into pieces

First prepare the Beurre Blanc. Put the shallots, vinegar, white wine and water in a small pan, bring to the boil and simmer until nearly all the water has evaporated. Add the cream and reduce a little more, then remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the butter a little at a time until it has all amalgamated, set aside and keep warm.

Trim off the spiky fins and scale the fish, and make 2 or three slashes to each side of the fish, Pre-heat the grill to high, brush the fish with melted butter and season inside, grill the fish for about 15 minutes each side (about 10 minutes if fillets).

Trim off the hard stalk ends of the Asparagus and steam until just soft, set aside and keep warm.

Toss the Asparagus in butter and season with ground sea salt and black pepper. Serve the fish at the table and pour over the Beurre Blanc.

