

# Chef's Corner: Mackerel & Mahi Roe with Bacon

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*No Shad Roe available – No Problem! Virtually any large set of Roe can be transformed into this Bacon-wrapped Southeastern Culinary Treat!*



***Broiled Spanish Mackerel Roe & Bacon with Garden-ripe Peppers, Tomatoes, Green Beans, & Mashers!***

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:

- |                 |      |              |    |
|-----------------|------|--------------|----|
| • 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!

I have fished the waters of Virginia and North Carolina for over 50 years and have come to associate spring being ushered in with the arrival of fresh Shad Roe in *real* local fish markets.

In fact, the inspiration for this month's recipe comes from our family restaurant, where broiled Shad Roe with Bacon was a seasonal best-seller from April through June for decades!

But the restaurant taught me much more as I mastered the skill of processing fresh fish to optimize utility and eliminate waste.

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!

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!

It's not like the culinary value of Roe is a new idea. Fish Roe has been relished at least since ancient Egypt and was regularly consumed in the U.S. as recently as the early 1900s. In fact, in a 1941 press release, the U.S. Department of the Interior strongly encouraged Americans to eat Fish Roe.

"*In all civilized countries,*" the release reads, "*the roes of certain fishes are of recognized high quality and classed among the most valuable of fishery products.*" At that time, the Roe of Salmon, Sturgeon, Whitefish, and Herring were canned "*...for the delectation of American gourmets...*" according to this press release.



***Smaller Sets of Roe are great Fried!***



***Fresh Spanish Fillets & Hefty Spring Roe!***



***Fresh-pulled Sets of Mahi Roe!***

With my European background, I didn't need much encouragement to embrace this scrumptious treat; in fact, I began to experiment with different ways of preparing Roe over 40 years ago, and rarely have I been disappointed!

I dredged those first tiny pale-yellow sacs, filled with delicate Flounder, Croaker, and Spot eggs in seasoned flour and fried them. What a great surprise I had when I popped that first morsel into my mouth!

As I began to encounter larger fish, I dipped the darker Roe of Striped Bass and Large Sea Trout (Weakfish) in cornmeal and sautéed them in butter – and later in bacon grease. Wow! It just kept getting better, and I was hooked!

The smaller panfish Roe was mild with a creamy texture, while the larger, darker Roe was more piquant and flavorful. Since then, I have harvested and prepared Roe from virtually every species I have caught, and it was all excellent provided it – along with the fish itself – was properly cared for and processed from field to kitchen (ice, ice, & more ice!).

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!

## Spanish Mackerel & Mahi Roe with Bacon

Pictured at right is the Spanish Mackerel which produced the 9-ounces of Roe featured in this article. While properly processed fish Roe freezes well (I vacuum-seal mine), there's nothing like a fresh-pulled set going straight from the fillet table to the kitchen!

### Ingredients:

8- to 10-ounce Set of Spanish Mackerel Roe (Mahi Roe is also superb!)

3-4 strips, hickory- or apple wood-smoked bacon

Sea Salt to taste (Himalayan salt is great, too!)

Fresh ground black pepper

Smoked paprika

Garlic powder to taste (optional – I'm a garlic lover!)

Light sprinkle of ground cayenne pepper (optional if you want heat)

1 garden-ripe tomato (optional – I liked the color, contrast, and sweetness)

1 sweet red pepper (optional, but it melded well with the salty sweetness)

Crusty bread ends for roasting – Italian loaf is great, as is Artisan bread

Tablespoon of Butter (for the garlic cheese toast)

Fresh grated mozzarella cheese

Lemon & parsley for garnish



***Author with a Fat Roe-Filled Spanish!***

### Directions:

***Step 1: Carefully remove the Roe as you fillet the fish!*** (or buy some fresh Roe from the local fish monger). The Spanish Mackerel that yielded the 9-oz Roe for this dish was caught in the Cape Hatteras surf and weighed-in at just under five pounds. I caught a pretty good mess of Spanish that day, and each yielded quality Roe.

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!

### ***Step 2: Prepare the Roe for the Broiler!***

I was at my cottage in OBX when I prepared this dish, so I used my trusty toaster oven, which is super versatile when preparing small meals for one!

I coated the pan with foil for ease of clean-up, but that's up to you!

Situate the Roe in the broiling pan and lightly season both sides with salt, pepper, and garlic (add a little cayenne if you want some kick). Old Bay, Cajun Shake, or other fave is fine, but I like to keep it simple since Roe is so rich in flavor.

Cover the seasoned Roe with bacon as shown and arrange the sliced tomato and red pepper around the perimeter of the Roe, lightly seasoning with salt, pepper, and garlic. The veggies will play in the bacon drippings as the fat renders!



***9-Ounce Set of Spanish Roe!***



***Roe After Adding the Bacon.***



***Add Fresh Tomato & Red Pepper!***

Broil on High until the bacon begins to brown and renders some basting fat in the pan. Use these bacon drippings to baste the veggies and Roe.

After basting, lightly dust with smoked paprika for color and a mild finishing flavor.

While the Roe is broiling, toast the sliced crusty bread ends and lightly butter each while basting the Roe.

Add a dash of salt and garlic powder to the toasted bread and cover with cheese.

Return the basted Roe and cheese-covered garlic toast to the broiler for about 5 more minutes or until nicely browned, but not burnt.



***Basted & Broiled with Toasted Italian Bread!***



***The Final product with Toasted Garlic Cheese Bread!***

### ***Step 3: Serve!***

Remove Roe and veggies from the broiler pan with a spatula; drizzle the drippings over the Roe; and serve hot!

I rounded out this Southern Classic with homemade mashed potatoes and fresh steamed green beans to complement the richness of the Roe.

It made for a well-balanced melding of flavors and textures, and the full-bodied crispness of the garlic-cheese toast was a perfect companion for the juices and flavors to play with!

## 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 that tips the scales at between six ounces and a pound. But there are so many other ways to enjoy large or small 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
- Deep-Fried Roe Bite Appetizers
- Scrambled Roe
- Baked Whole Shad with Roe (an old-time Maryland tradition!)
- Fried Bluegill Eggs
- Spicy Fried Fish Egg Masala
- Fish Egg Fritters Curry
- Taramasalata – I would shame my heritage if I didn't list this Grecian masterpiece!



*Scrambled Roe is Wicked-Good!*

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.



*Striped Bass Roe with Fresh Herbs!*



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