

Chef's Corner: Pan-Fried Spot – The Ultimate Panfish!

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As Panfish go, Spot tops the list of fine table fare, and Saltwater Anglers across Virginia and the Carolinas cherish this smaller cousin of the revered Red Drum!



My Dad enjoying a plate of fresh fried Spot and a Greek Salad.



OBX-style Spot Fry Mess for Lunch!

Life was simple when I was 12. Summer meant playing baseball all day, couples-only skates with the girls at the Plaza Roller Rink, and pier fishing for Spot at 14th Street in Virginia Beach - one of the few things my Dad and I did together on occasion.

So, every once in a while, I take a trip down memory lane, hit the pier, and seek-out these tasty little relics of good times past.

Catching Spot seems different than other fish somehow. It's not a trophy fish by any stretch, and it doesn't go on drag-busting runs, but there lies in it a certain mystique of generations past and a promise to generations ahead.

Maybe it's a little like baseball. It symbolizes summer and simplicity. It's always there, and it doesn't require any remarkable knowledge, equipment, or skill. Just an old spinning reel, a simple bottom rig, and a can-o-worms.

Catching big Drum is great. The thump of Spanish and Blues hitting metal turns the adrenaline up. The drag-smoking run of a big Marlin – terrific.

But for this simple man, I'll take a nostalgic day of Spot fishing over all else...

I hope you enjoy this simple, yet essential, Southern recipe.

Except for the occasional fall run of “Yellow Bellies,” Spot typically average only 7-10 inches, but catching them always seems so rewarding – perhaps because it has the power to take us back in time, but also because it is excellent table fare!

I have filleted Spot in the past, but I must say, frying them whole is hands-down the best way I know to eat these delicious little critters!



Cleaned and Scaled – Ready for the Flour!



Typical Pan-sized NC Spot – Perfect for the Skillet!

INGREDIENTS:

Half a dozen fresh whole Spot, cleaned and scaled

Seafood Breading Mix – options include House Autry Medium-hot or Seafood blend; hushpuppy mix; corn meal; plain flour; or any mix or blend you prefer!

Seasoning to taste – salt & pepper is the simplest, but Old Bay or any Cajun shake will work great too!

Peanut oil for frying – enough to fully cover the fish while frying

Your choice of condiments – typically fresh halved lemon or malt vinegar

Classic sides include hand-cut fried potatoes and a hearty Greek salad!

DIRECTIONS:

Roll whole fish in breading mix to evenly coat – I like to pat some breading inside the rib cavity as well!

Heat oil to 375 degrees F

Shake excess flour off each Spot and place in hot oil

Fry for about 5 minutes on each side if using a skillet or cook ten minutes in a deep fat fryer

Remove from fryer when brown and crisped and serve with your choice of sides and condiments!

SERVING SUGGESTIONS:

Here are a few things I'd like to share on eating these delicacies once cooked.

Our family loves to eat “The Crispies” first! These treats are the crisped tail, pectoral, and ventral fins. They are delicious and loaded with calcium. We just remove them and much away – kinda’ like tater chips!

Next, I like to carefully pinch and remove the full length of the dorsal fin, which also removes all of the dorsal pin bones.

After that, I pull the ventral fin complex in a similar manner to remove all ventral bones.

Then, I use a butter knife to gently remove the meat from the bone on the top side.

That will leave the main skeletal bone exposed, and I simply lift up on that whole skeleton from the tail end to leave the remainder of the meat deboned on the plate.

Squeeze a little lemon juice on the meat and enjoy!

It's still wise look for any pin bones were missed, but with Spot, I tend to chew most of them up since they are so soft and small. I then pick over the ribs, head, and shoulders to nibble away and remaining meat – it's all too good to waste!



Just roll em' in seasoned flour!



Fry to a Crispy Brown!



Now that's what I call a Hot Mess!



A Modest Serving Size – I like 6 or 8



Classic plate of Old Bay Spot!



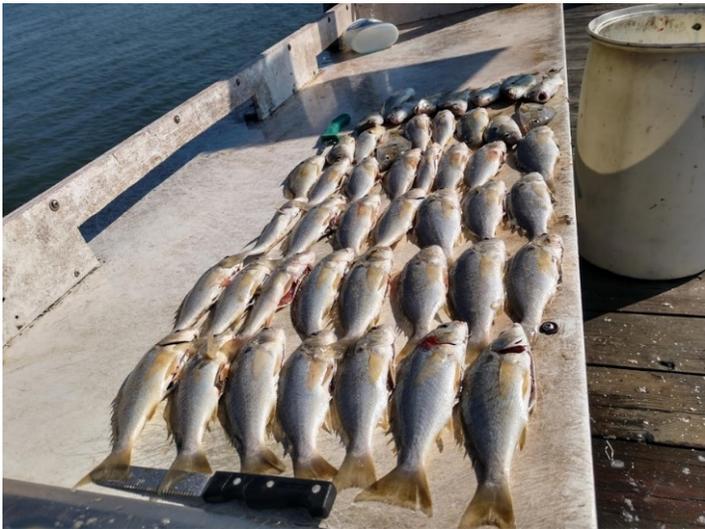
Perfectly Crisped Twins!



No Better Accompaniment than Hand-cut Fries!



A nice Greek Salad is another great Side for a Fried Spot!



Nice Mess of Spot taken off the Ocean View Pier.



Vacuum-seal and Quick-freeze for later use!

As shown above, the process is very simple, so anyone can now embrace cooking whole fish to preserve all that great flavor and optimize the use of every inch and ounce edible meat – a recurring theme in my Chef's Corner recipes!

Contributed by: VBAC Angler John Germanos, aka "The Instinctive Chef."