

# Chef's Corner: Spiny Dogfish Belly Po' Boys

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JANUARY 2021

*To heck with eating “High on the Hog,” this New Orleans classic will have you going “Low on the Dog” bite after bite!*

The classic Po' Boy sandwich is a traditional southern favorite made famous in New Orleans kitchens and is an amazing way to utilize just about any “scrap meat” from a variety of fish species, and it is especially good with any dogfish shark belly meat.

Traditional Po' Boys are filled with either roast beef or fried seafood (oysters, shrimp, lobster, or whatever you have) and topped with pickles, lettuce, tomatoes, and mayonnaise. Nowadays, however, you can fill a Po' Boy with just about anything you want (burger patties, hot sausage, French fries, alligator meat, caprese salad, etc.).

The sandwich itself has been present in New Orleans since the late 1800s. During that era, it was called an oyster loaf (literally, fried oysters on French loaves). The origins of when it started being called a “Po' Boy” are sketchy at best, and a lot of different legends have attached themselves to the sandwich over the years.

I developed my own theory based on some research and an understanding of what life was like in New Orleans during the early 1900s, and especially during the trying period from the onset of World War I and into the Great Depression.

Poverty was widespread during that period, and many of the “Po' Folk” struggled to afford life's basic necessities (food, shelter, and clothing). While restaurants flourished during this period, they were considered establishments for the “Haves” rather than the “Have Nots.”

Whether motivated by pragmatism or compassion, several eateries began allowing the poor to come to the back door for cheap scrap meals (often leftovers) as a way to utilize odds and ends that would otherwise have been discarded.

One such meal would be day-old French bread split open to serve as plate to hold scraps of seafood, meat, and “crispies” leftover from the frying process. Lettuce and other scrap toppings were often piled on, and for just a few pennies, the local Po' Boys would have their only meal for the day – hence the term “Po' Boy Sandwich” was born – or at least, that's MY story!



*Crispy-fried Dogfish Belly Po' Boy!*



*Author with a pair of March OBX Spinies!*

Variations of this New Orleans classic abound and often include shrimp, lobster, oysters, and other prime seafood ingredients, but I jokingly refer to these derivatives as “Rich Boy” sandwiches since few of us Po’ Folk can afford them!

So, for now, it’s time to “live low on the dog (dogfish, that is),” and fry-up those belly scraps for a true old fashioned Po’ Boy meal that is worth its weight in culinary gold!

## Ingredients

This is a basic list of ingredients, but the options are limitless, so experiment and tailor your sandwich build freely!

- ¼-pound dogfish belly meat
- Iceberg lettuce, shredded
- Tomato, sliced thin
- Dill pickle slices
- Sharp cheddar cheese
- Mayonnaise
- Egg wash
- Corn starch
- Flour or breading mix

Suitable breading mixtures include House Autry Seafood Breading Mix; House Autry Medium-Hot Breading Mix; and Zatarain’s cajun seafood breading mix. You can certainly create your own breading mix, and numerous beer batter recipes work great as well!

You can also substitute various condiments for the mayonnaise to include aioli blends, tartar sauce, and various special sauces and/or salad dressing mixtures.

Additional toppings include thinly sliced onion; hot and/or sweet pickled peppers; sweet breakfast pickles or relish; various lettuces; cilantro; various cheeses; and a variety of slaws and fresh relishes.

## Directions

Serve with a lemon wedge on a plate of hand-cut fried potatoes and your choice of condiments.

### *Removing the Belly Meat:*

In the March 2020 Chef’s Corner installment, I did a feature on processing the underappreciated Spiny Dogfish, but other dogfish species such as the abundant Smooth Dogfish are certainly just as good, so feel free to adapt based on the catch of the day!

Next to the versatile meat of the various stingrays, Spiny Dogfish are a vastly underrated and overlooked meat fish and is widely regarded as a “trash fish,” or nuisance species by surf anglers up and down our coast.



*Dressed carcass with head and entrails removed and fins intact.*

This fish is versatile, mild, and delicious with a soft, delicate and moist texture that is very appealing to even the pickiest diners. In fact, across Europe, and especially in the United Kingdom, it is highly regarded as one of the top three fish in most authentic corner Fish-n-Chips eateries (aka “Chip Shops”).

They are relatively easy to process, and an added benefit is the complete lack of bones since the skeletal structure is built of an easy-to-remove cartilage center strip with absolutely no pin bones or bones of any kind to worry about.

Males grow to over three feet while females routinely top five feet in length. Larger Spinies can either be filleted after skinning or cut into tasty steaks for the grill, skillet, or broiler.

As with most game and fish, some of the tastiest meat can be found in the trimmings so often discarded – especially the buttery belly meat! My skinning method is by no means exclusive, but it works and it preserves the sweet belly meat.



*Remove tail & split skin.*



*Peel each side of the skin off.*



*Fins, tail, & skin removed.*



*Belly meat ready to slide off the skin.*



*Skins after belly meat is removed.*



*Skinned core & belly meat.*

A bonus of dogfish fillets is that there will never be any pin bones or bones of any nature for that matter, so they are ideal for kids and others that worry about fine bones when consuming most other fish! Also, the belly meat is well worth salvaging and makes incredible Po' Boy sandwiches when fried crispy – a Germanos Family favorite!

Once the meat has been skinned and cut into strips, it's time to break out the toppings and condiments!

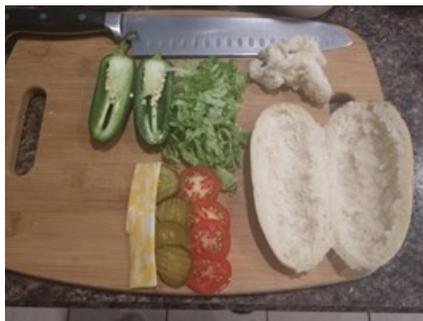
Mayonnaise is the traditional choice, but tartar sauce, aioli, or any personal favorite can certainly be substituted or added!

If you want to go simple, traditional toppings include sliced tomato, shredded lettuce, and pickle, but the imagination is the limit for this hugely versatile sandwich.

I like to add sharp cheddar cheese and sliced or chopped peppers – from jalapenos and serranos to Thai Chilis and habaneros – putting the hot crispy belly strips right onto the cheese to melt and bind all the goodies together on the bun!



*Prepping the Po' Boy build options.*



*Prepping the Hoagie/Sub Roll.*



*Building a bed for the hot strips!*

As you can see, for thick buns and hoagie rolls, I like to pinch some of the dough out to create a bed to hold all the goodies, and a slather of mayo to help 'em all stick! Once that tasty Po' Boy bed is built, it's time to fry-up some sizzlin'-hot, crispy belly strips!

Dust the belly strips in corn starch, then dip in egg wash and drench in batter as shown in the pictures below. This technique will yield crispy strips for that perfect texture atop that Po' Boy bun full of goodness! Use whatever breading mix you like, but I used Zatarain's Cajun breader with a little added cayenne pepper for this New Orleans delight!

You can also use your favorite beer batter and/or "Chip-Shop Batter." That will crisp-up just fine as well and may just leave you some of those Po' Boy crispies to really lend an authentic touch!

Place the sizzling HOT crisped belly strips directly on the cheese to begin the melting process. The sooner you fold that Po' Boy, the better to get that cheese to melt just right!



*Sliced belly strips – low on the dog!*



*The breading station.*



*Breaded belly strips for the fryer.*



*Deep-frying the belly strips.*



*Crispy-fried belly strips.*



*Folding it all into the Po' Boy!*

Serve with a lemon wedge and a nice pile of hand-cut fried potatoes and any other condiments you desire, but for me, that simple layer of mayo or homemade tartar sauce is just about perfect!



*Plating the Po' Boy on a fresh bun.*



*Carefully folding the sandwich.*



*Passing Mom's taste test!*

## Dispelling the Trash Fish Myth

Several years ago I was surf fishing near “The Point” in Buxton, NC. It was early April, and when I backed my truck up to my spot, one of the locals laughed and said, “All you’re gonna catch here is dogsharks today!” I could not hide my excitement, and this old salt looked at me like I had two heads when I exclaimed, “AWESOME!”

He then watched me catch and process a dozen of the larger Spiny and Smooth dogfishes and asked if I was actually gonna eat them nasty critters. I laughed and told him they were some of the best eating fish in the surf! He shook his head and walked away mumbling, and I walked away with a cooler-full of fantastic meat fish!

Many otherwise savvy anglers still consider dogfish sharks to be trash fish. This never ceases to amaze me. As a meat fish, they are plentiful at a time of year when many other fish are hard to come by. They are relatively easy to catch, and as for palatability, Spiny Dogfish are right up there with Puffers on my *personal* game fish list every winter and spring!

This recipe highlights one way to utilize the tasty trimmings, but this superb fish can be featured in so many more outstanding dishes that include some of the following meals which I have recently created using Spiny Dogfish as the featured ingredient:

- English Pub Dogfish Fish-n-Chips with Malt Vinegar and hand-cut homemade fries
- Dogfish Steak Osso Buco – made with thicker steaks and every bit as good as the Italian veal shank classic!
- Spanish Dogfish Stew with Picada and Veggies (can use steaked dogfish or fillets)
- Blackened Dogfish Bites (can also blacken whole fillets or steaks)
- Doggie Poppers –these fried delicacies are excellent served with a nice lime-garlic aioli, fresh lemon, Cajun shake, or homemade tartar sauce!
- Fried Dogfish Fingers with Honey Mustard, Buffalo Wing, and Barbecue Dipping Sauces, with Celery and Carrot Sticks and my homemade Chunky Bleu Cheese Dressing
- Dogfish Steaks in lemon sauce with sautéed fresh spinach over angel hair pasta
- Dogfish and Cheddar Sandwich with my homemade Tartar Sauce and hand-cut fries
- Dogfish Tacos

And that’s just the tip of the iceberg – there are sure to be more great dishes ahead!



*Spiny Dogfish-n-Chips – a UK Classic.*



*Spiny Dogfish Steak Osso Buco style!*



*Spanish Dogfish Stew.*

Look for these recipes in current and future editions of VBAC’s Chef’s Corner! In the meantime, I hope you put these Po’ Boy sandwiches to the test – ENJOY!

*Contributed by: VBAC Member John Germanos, aka “The Instinctive Chef” and inspired by my Hometown Chip Shop in Leigh-On-Sea, Essex, England.*