

Filleting Your Fish

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Marie: You're listening to The Fish Dish, brought to you by Eat Wisconsin Fish, a campaign of the Wisconsin Sea Grant Program. Are you fish-curious? Or are you a fish expert who wants to learn even more about Wisconsin's fisheries and cooking fish? We'll give you the latest "dish" on fish.

Your hosts are . . .

Sharon: Sharon Moen

Marie: and Marie Zhuikov

Together: Two friends who have been working for Sea Grant seemingly forever and who know a thing or two about fish.

Marie: But that's "forever" in a good way.

Sharon: Sharon is a food-fish outreach coordinator.

Marie: And Marie is a science communicator.

In this episode you'll learn how to fillet a fish from Sam Peterson, a fisheries biologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Sharon and I have heard from listeners that being handed a whole fish—one with the head still on and insides still inside—can be intimidating. We'll talk to Sam about his job, his hobby of microfishing, then he'll break the fish filleting process down. I even try my hand at filleting a walleye, and then we get into different filleting techniques for different species of fish. For the Fish-o-Licious part of our podcast, I cook a new recipe called, "Oh My, Arctic Char!" It's really simple and easy and can be used on almost any kind of fish. Sharon was feeling under the weather, so you're stuck with me for this episode.

Now, let's meet Sam.

Marie: Well, hi, Sam.

Sam: Hi.

Marie: Welcome to The Fish Dish.

Sam: Thank you. Happy to be here.

Marie: Yeah, why don't you tell us a little bit about what you do for the Wisconsin DNR?

Sam: So, I'm a fish biologist working out of Superior Office in Wisconsin. And in my office, both me and another co-fish biologist, focus on the South Shore tributaries that flow into Lake Superior.

Marie: Which tributaries are those?

Sam: We work within Douglas, Bayfield and Ashland, and sometimes Iron counties, and that consists of over 250 stations spread across over 600 different stream reaches.

Marie: Wow. That's, that's a lot, geez. *(Laughs)* But you know, we were talking a little bit before and, but the main ones are the St. Louis River, right? And the Brule?

Sam: Yes. So, we do have prioritized focused areas that we spend a little more time on, and that is the St. Louis River or estuary, further downstream from the Fond du Lac Dam. And then of course, the Bois Brule River in Wisconsin. Over in Bayfield County, we have a handful that are stationed around like the Apostle Islands areas, but those are where we spend most of our time on.

Marie: Oh, nice. And so how long have you been doing this?

Sam: I started this position with Wisconsin DNR back in July of 2023. Previously I've worked all across the Midwest. I've spent some time down in Indiana with their Department of Natural Resources, quite a few years in Minnesota. And just recently, before being on-boarded to this position, I was working with the federal government with the Fish and Wildlife Service, over in Ashland, Wisconsin.

You know, each position is pretty unique to the goals and objectives of that job. But this one, yeah, looking at the South Shore streams are mainly looking at those migrating coldwater fish species, trout and salmon that'll move up seasonally into those streams and then they'll spawn. And then we get out there and look at how successful they were and what we can hope for in the future to be out there in the main lake that people can go and catch.

Marie: So, you know a thing or two about fish! *(Laughs)*

Sam: Yes, a couple things.

Marie: When you're out there in the field doing what you do, what do you find that anglers want to know about -- what fish species do they ask you the most about?

Sam: The majority of people are focused on walleye more in Douglas County on the St. Louis River. And then the further east you go more towards Bayfield you get more preference of those coldwater fish, like splake, brown trout, sometimes coho salmon and lake trout. So, it all just depends on the area you live in and whatever fish just happens to be more productive in that system. So, walleye here in the St. Louis is kind of our go-to contender and our top dog. And people are always interested to hear what those population levels look like and how healthy is that stock of fish. And what can we expect for years to come.

Marie: I know there's a sea lamprey barrier on the Brule River. Do people ask you what's going on with the lamprey population?

Sam: Absolutely. Yeah. That's a really common thread that we get a lot of phone calls about. And to give you a little bit of background. When the first, we call it a weir or roadblock for these invasive species was constructed, to get at this population of fish that are inhibiting these native lake trout species in Lake Superior. And so, our thought was design this thing so the water flows right down the middle and creates a high level of velocity or flow. So, fish could not swim past that, but then we quickly realized that no fish could pass that. So that created a pretty solid barrier to all fish species. So, we wanted to make it just for sea lamprey. So, we ended up tearing that original structure down. And now what we have to-date is a fishway sea lamprey barrier. So, it's kind of two things at once. So, we have a fish ladder on one side that fish are able to easily swim up past the barrier and get through. And the sea lamprey swim into a trap and they're kind of filtered like a funnel minnow trap, I like to describe, kind of like the end of a pop

bottle. They kind of swim in through the small hole and then they get trapped into this open capsule. That is how that system works. And so we confirm the fish passage of cold water species, through evidence of, we actually, constructed a glass window down below the river level in a bunker. So, we call an observation window, and we have a 24/7 camera it down there. And that is constantly recording all the different species and numbers of fish that get up there. We have a technician every year that is back at the office reviewing that information and to give us these total numbers. And so, we are able to type everything up and do a quick one-page report that we push out every fall and spring. So, anglers are always interested to hear what the fishway counts are looking like. And that's sometimes how they indicate when they want to get out there and go fish.

Marie: And that observation window, the general public can't go in there, can they, is it just for DNR folks?

Sam: So, 24/7 it's locked, and we have some security measures enforced. Like, we just installed a brand-new fencing throughout the system. It's more of a safety and security hazard, so, however, anyone is anyone that's interested in a tour can just give us a call and we'll take them out there and we'll unlock the gate bring them down into the hole and they can take a look at the whole system. We frequently will have tours of classes from institutions like UW-Superior or UMD. That's always a good opportunity for outreach.

Marie: One thing you do is angler surveys with your job. And so tell us a little bit about that.

Sam: Yeah. Angler survey is just a, what we call a creel survey. Same thing. Basically, that informs us how to do our job.

Marie: You're at boat launches, huh?

Sam: Exactly. Yeah. So, we'll have our dedicated boat launches, and they'll have their schedules and then there'll be stationed there for certain hours of the day, basically just interviewing anglers that are coming on and off the water.

Marie: What did you catch today? *(Laughs)*

Sam: Exactly, yeah, yeah. What did you catch? What was your harvest? How many fish? Could we possibly get lengths from them? And what would you like to see change? Any preferences? We take all that information, bring it back to the office, and over the winter we'll be able to all kind of sit down and talk about what is our local angler base interested in and what are they catching. And that can really pair well with some of our surveys that we'll get out and do. And so, we'll look at the fish information that we are collecting and what the anglers are catching, and try to try to do some data analyses with them to spit out some really good reporting information that the public can use hopefully to their benefit.

Marie: Mm hmm. Sounds like magic. *(Laughs)* Data magic.

Sam: Exactly.

Marie: And one thing we get asked about sometimes is, contamination levels in fish and things. And in general, I was wondering if you could say how the contaminant levels are doing in the St. Louis River fish and fish in other areas.

Sam: Absolutely. I can touch on that. Within the Great Lakes watershed, including Lake Superior, back in the early nineties, people started to gather and compile information and realize that long-term industrialization was impacting the landscape and sometimes the utilities that people enjoy like swimming and fishing. We were able to locate specific areas of concern that we're calling them. And St. Louis River is an Area of Concern. And we decided to come together and create and establish goals and objectives to remove this label and bring everything back to a safe level of both contaminants and water quality so people can get back to what they enjoy is getting out there and enjoying the resource.

Marie: And we is like the community, right?

Sam: Absolutely. There's a huge swath of partners and agencies: Minnesota, Wisconsin, tribal communities and institutions, all coming together and getting moving towards this goal.

So, 2026 is the projected date of when almost all of these projects are going to be completed. In regards to contaminants, one of the studies that they do on a three-year rotation is going out there collecting a series of fish that anglers are most likely to catch at certain sizes, and then they'll bring them back to their lab with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency as one of the partners, and then they look at mercury levels, PCBs are polychlorinated biphenyls, and PFAS, and they're basically tracking that through time, as they're completing more and more projects, are we seeing a change? And can we get to a point where those levels are low enough that we can remove the Area of Concern off of the St. Louis River? So, 2026 is, fingers crossed, we can get there but still a few more boxes to check off.

Marie: I think it's so encouraging to see this process take place over the years. It's nice to see people coming back to the river and things. I think one impression is that in 2026, the river will be perfect. It'll, you know, you can drink the water or whatever. *(Laughs)* Even after it's delisted, there's still gonna be work to do, right?

Sam: Absolutely. So, it's still an ongoing project. There's still so much to be done.

Marie: Do you have a favorite fish that you like to work with or eat?

Sam: Hmmmm. So, in my early professional career, kind of right as I was getting through college, I was mainly focused on a lot of big rivers, fish management. And their techniques are so unique, especially with catfish populations. And one of the more uncommon native species that people are maybe unaware of is something called a blue sucker. It looks exactly like what it sounds like. It's lesser-known native species. It lives in really fast river currents. It's just such a unique-looking fish. So, I just always appreciated how it looks. So that was probably my early career choice if I had to, if I had to pick, but right.

Marie: And, and how does it look?

Sam: Yeah. So, it's got a really extended nose. So, it protrudes at least two or three inches beyond the eye and then underneath, because it is a sucker, it does have that, like what we call ventral or bottom facing mouth. And then it's just, it's a dark blue color, which you just don't see in too many freshwater fish species.

But if I had to choose a fish that I'm currently working with now, it's really hard not to pick the brook trout, simply because of its growth potential in Lake Superior, when it can turn into what we call coaster

or a lake run brook trout where they just grow to large sizes and they're just beautiful. You can't deny any photo that you've seen online of just how they look. That'd be my choice.

Marie: Yeah, they are very pretty. And I hear that also you have an interesting hobby. It's a hobby, right? Or do you do it at work, too, microfishing? *(Laughs)*

Sam: Certainly, a hobby, yes.

Marie: Uh huh. And tell us what microfishing is for the uninitiated.

Sam: Yeah, yeah, I'm certainly no expert, but I have dabbled in quite a bit of microfishing and essentially, you're just targeting those smaller, lesser known, common native species of fish. And so, they can get to all sorts of different habitats that you're probably less likely to run into if you were to target maybe your general walleye or panfish populations into a lake. So, this, this will get you to explore and hike through different areas of forest and streams. Maybe give you a little appreciation for, where you wouldn't normally go in through a state park, for instance. But, yeah, you're just taking as small line as possible and a small hook you can get at any fly fisherman shop and put like a little flick of worm on there. And most of the time you're sight fishing for them. So maybe you're standing, hovering over a culvert or you're just sitting right down next to the stream bank or pond or lake. And they're usually just tucked up into these rocks or vegetation and you're just dipping your rod with that small hook and line right in front of their faces and you'll pop them out.

So, the angling is maybe less exciting about it, but it's the photography and getting out there and appreciating a unique area of the resource maybe you wouldn't normally go to. It was always kind of fun for me.

Marie: And so, I assume you don't eat these tiny fish. Are you saying that you take photos of them?

Sam: Exactly. Yeah. So, they all go back into the water. But what's kind of neat is if you are into photography, there's these clear transparent cases that you can purchase and just fill them with water and put the fish in. So, you get, you know, their fins fully exposed and gives you a little better opportunity instead of just having them sitting on your hand.

Marie: Mmm mmm.

Sam: So that's, that's always an option. Most of the time you're in like probably less than a foot of water just to be able to sight fish and like locate where that fish is and then being able to bring your rod and draw it right in front of it. And hopefully it bites the end of the line.

Marie: Wow. That's really interesting. *(Laughs)* So today we have larger fish and we invited Sam here to help teach us how to fillet a fish. And I could use lessons too, because I've tried in the past to fillet a fish, I didn't have a fillet knife, but Sharon, she bought me a fillet knife.

Sam: Really?

Marie: Yeah. So, I've got that over on the counter and want to try my hand at it too. But I've tried in the past and it's been sad. It's more like fish mauling than fish filleting. We're going to try that today. Sam brought some burbot, right?

Sam: Yes.

Marie: Burbot and what else? A walleye?

Sam: And walleye, correct.

Marie: Plus, we have black crappies from Forest Lake, Minnesota, from one of Sharon's friends, and Arctic char from the Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility. And they're fish that were no longer needed and they're huge!

So, we have quite a variety. I don't know if we'll get to them all, but we'll see as we go along.

Sam: Yeah, and I'm happy to provide my perspective on how we can fillet these fish, but I know that there's several techniques across many different people. It's just yeah, happy to share my perspective on how I go about it.

Marie: Okay. So, before we get into the *action* part is there anything else you wanted to say?

Sam: I guess I would rather just put in a shameless plug to say that the South Shore tributaries, the lesser-known ones, provide a really productive opportunity to go in and catch your coldwater fish: rainbow trout, brown trout, and brook trout. I invite anyone to get out there and explore those lesser-known areas: the Flag River, Bark River, Cranberry. Those watersheds really provide a lot of great fishing opportunity and it's something, if you want to get away from the crowds and go out and try something new and explore a different part of Northern Wisconsin. There's some hidden gems that people can still find and really enjoy.

Marie: Mmm, yeah. It sounds really beautiful. So yeah. Okay. Let's cut up some fish! *Laughs.*

Sam: Let's do it!

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Marie: Before we begin, you'll need to understand some of the terms Sam uses while he's working. He refers to things like the pectoral fins, which are the short fins on the side of the fish near their head. If a fish had arms, that's where they'd be. He also says dorsal fin, which is the fin on the top of the fish's back. We begin with a walleye, then move onto a char, then burbot, then crappies. I'll be the first to admit, it's hard to understand how to fillet a fish by listening to someone else do it. Check out the episode extras page for this show to see helpful images. As we start, the fish is laying on its side on a cutting board.

Sam: Alright, so we got about a 15-inch walleye there we're going to start with, and the most important thing is that you're going to start right behind the pectoral fin near the head. So, I'm going to start with the edge of my knife right on the back of its neck, and I'm going to make a straight cut all the way down right behind the pelvic fin. Now I'm going to flip this fish around, so I get a better look at it.

So now I'm going to locate the spine on the back of its neck. So, where that cut was started, I'm going to continue that right next to the dorsal fin. And slowly work my way down towards the tail. And I can feel the chest cavity that I'm bumping up against midway through. So, I'm going to keep going until that chest cavity, I can't feel it anymore.

Marie: And those are like, are those the ribs?

Sam: Yes. Yeah, basically. And as soon as you get past those ribs, you can puncture all the way through. Still being able to feel that spine. I'm just following that spine. So, then you just cut all the way to the end of the tail. And some people like to cut that fillet off right away. I like to save it. Once you're able to scrape the fillet off the skin of the fish, it's just a little easier to have some grip. But what we worked on towards the head, right in front of those ribs, you can feel and hear those ribs. (*Scraping sound*) I'm just gliding my knife up and over them to create a boneless fillet.

Once you get up and over, you can just follow that line and cut up and around that cavity, and then you have your first fillet that was released. The reason I didn't cut it off is so I don't have to use my fingers to hold it down when I'm taking the fillet off the skin.

Marie: Oh.

Sam: So, I start with my incision near the tail and I'm working back towards the head from that fillet. So, I'm just keeping my knife facing downward and following the edge until that fillet just pops right off.

Marie: Nice. So, you can just kind of feel the skin on the bottom. How do you know that you're not cutting through the skin?

Sam: Yeah, and that's certainly a feel thing that just, it does take a little time to develop. But a tip is wherever my cutting board is and my knife is, before I start to make the cut, I want them parallel so they're all facing the same direction as the cutting board. And keep the edge of my knife just tipped down or just slightly as I'm working down. So, that's the only, probably the only way I can describe it. But it's just rinse and repeat on the other side.

Marie: And how did you learn how to fillet fish? Did someone teach you or?

Sam: Yeah, I fished a lot with my dad growing up. Yeah, I would say my dad is my go-to teacher in all of this. He really helped me fillet most of my panfish and even some northern pike. But my grandpa I gotta attribute to all my walleye fillets. He was the walleye fanatic. He just like, couldn't get enough of them. And actually, to be honest, he was probably the best fisherman in our family. He'd catch the most, right? So we would just have more walleye to work with. He'd catch them, show me how to fillet them, and that was the end of that.

Marie: Hmph. And I learned from my uncle how to take the skin off catfish.

Sam: Oh, sure!

Marie: Yeah, but I did not learn how to fillet as a youngster, for some reason.

Sam: Yeah, catfish is one of my favorite fillets to eat. (*Scraping sound*) All right. So, there's that second fillet. So, I know that I got into a few of the ribs, so when I come back to clean, I'll just take a cut right down where those ribs would be and then ...

Marie: Those are the little pin bones?

Sam: Yes. Essentially. And then just cut those out of there. There. That cleans it up a little bit. There you have it.

Marie: Nice! Should I try it now? (*Laughs*)

Sam: Absolutely!

Marie: You got another walleye in here? So, this is my fancy fillet knife I've never used yet. *(Laughs)* Sharon got me for a present. So, I'm going to try it here. So, I start just like right.

Sam: Yep, right behind the pectoral fin.

Marie: Right there. And you cut just like part way, right?

Sam: Right till you feel the spine, yeah. If it's naturally hard right there, go ahead and stop.

Marie: Okay. And then you cut down the back?

Sam: Yes.

Marie: And do I do just a little bit? Like a quarter of an inch?

Sam: So, you'll go maybe a half inch through, and you'll actually feel those ribs. You'll like kind of hear them flaking across the knife. Until right about halfway through, you'll want to pierce it all the way through.

Marie: Oh, okay. So like, maybe here, I hear some crunching.

Sam: So, kind of right where the dorsal fin ends is usually when you can pop it back out.

Marie: Maybe I'm too deep.

Sam: Oh, you're looking good.

Marie: Okay.

Sam: Yeah, there you go. Now keep the tip pointed down.

Marie: He's got thorns! He's got stickers!

Sam: Prickly.

Marie: Oh, on the tip of their dorsal fins they have spines. I didn't know that. I guess I know it now.

Sam: Find out the hard way.

Marie: Yeah. And then what do I do?

Sam: So, now you work back up near the head, where your left hand is, and start to work up and over those ribs.

Marie: Uh huh.

Sam: So, you're just letting the knife kind of flake over those bones. I mean, so just think of them like a half circle, you're just kind of coming up and over them.

Marie: I might have a very thin fillet here. *(Laughs)*

Sam: That's okay. Figuring it out. Yeah, so then keep peeling it back so you can kind of expose, kind of, you can see a little more. Just keep working it back down towards the belly. And then once it gets thin again, that's when you start to see the belly meat, and then you typically pierce through that skin again.

Marie: This is a multi-layered fillet. *(Laughs)*

Sam: It's all good. Yeah, that's a good idea. Starting from the tail end and working back up towards the head.

Marie: But I did miss the ribs, so.

Sam: Awesome. Yeah, just make it cut right there. There you go. Flip it over.

Marie: Wow!

Sam: Really not bad at all. Have you filleted walleyes before?

Marie: No! This is my first one!

Sam: Oh, wow! I'm honored! Cool, cool.

Marie: Now flip it over on the other side.

Sam: Well, it's up to you if you want to take the fillet off that skin or not first.

Marie: Oh, right. Okay. And you do it on this end?

Sam: Yep, just make a cut right there.

Marie: There! Look at that!

Sam: Yeah, that's really good. Not bad at all.

Marie: Yay!

Sam: So there actually is one other walleye technique I know how to do, and that's just to go straight through the ribs, and then once you take the whole fillet off you gotta carve the ribs off of it, but I just do it this way to kinda skip that step.

Marie: And this way you don't have to gut the fish or anything.

Sam: Exactly.

Marie: Guts just stay in there.

Sam: Pretty simple.

Marie: So now, Sam's doing an Arctic char.

Sam: Alright, so you can fillet this char just like you could any other trout or salmon species. So, this is just going to be an example of that. I'm going to start right at the connection between the two gill plates. And I'm going to insert--so this is the bottom right below the mouth--I'm just inserting, puncturing a hole and I'm just cutting a straight-line incision all the way back to the anal fin.

Sam: But I'm going to come back up to where we started that first cut, kind of right on the chin of it, and make another cut a little further up into the body cavity, and that releases the guts, so you can just pull them out and dispose of them.

They all kind of just fall out. I'll toss them away. Alright. So now we kind of have a blank slate to work from. Similar to what we did to the walleye, now, right behind the pectoral fin, I'm going to make that cut until I feel that spine, and then from here, I'm actually going to continue my cut and just follow that spine all the way to the tail.

Marie: And this time you cut off the tail, huh?

Sam: Correct, and then we're gonna take the rest of the ribs off, once we get the second fillet off. So, flip the fish around, Do the exact same thing on the other side, right behind the pectoral fin, until I feel the spine. You can just kind of hear that, and then just working across that body. So, a few different ways that you can take these fillets off the skin. Do you mind if I use your knife as well?

Marie: Yeah, go ahead.

Sam: Okay. Um, so I like to, you can use a fork or two knives. Because I'm right-handed, I'll use my left hand with the knife and I'll just insert it into the meat just to give me a little grip, while I'm carving out the rest of the ribs. And where you can kind of hear or feel those ribs. I'm going to start just above them and begin to carve them just off of that fillet. I'll just slide them up and out. Sometimes you can just use your hands. That's all there really is to it. And then, just like we did on the walleye, I'm just going to take it off. Separate the skin from the meat.

Marie: It's interesting that there's different fillet techniques for different species of fish. I mean, I knew there was different ones for a fish like burbot and catfish versus, you know, versus more bonier fish, but it would make sense because fish are a little bit different.

Sam: Even in the same species, right, people just have quick tips or preferences on how they want to get the flesh off. So, this was a freshly caught burbot a couple weeks ago on the St. Louis River and we're going to show you how to take a couple fillets off this thing today. I'm going to start behind the pelvic pectoral fins once again and right at the top of the head I'm going to make my first incision and just make a straight line right behind those fins right until I feel the spine.

And this is going to be for the first fillet, so I'll flip this over. And starting at the back, when I first made that cut, I'm going to follow it along the spine. I can feel those ribs halfway through. Just like I would a walleye or crappie, right until those ribs, I don't feel them anymore, so I still feel them. So right there, I can pierce through to the belly. And then still following the spine, work my way all the way down to the tail.

I'm not going to fully take it off, so I can get that fillet, peel it off the skin a little easier. Now, I can feel those ribs, and so I'm going to continue to scrape that meat just up and over them. The majority of the meat you get is going to be on the back and then the further you get towards the belly you're going to get some, but not a ton. And right, you're going to see that skin and that's where I just like to cut all the way through till I pass the ribs and then it kind of widens out again.

Marie: So, you get a long strip of ...

Sam: Exactly, burbot gives you a really good long strip of white meat. And I'll just make the cut, another incision right where the tail piece started. And run my knife parallel to the cutting board. Just ripping that meat off the skin. That is your first fillet.

Marie: Nice.

Sam: Yeah, what's next?

Marie: Should we do crappies?

Sam: Sure. Yeah, it's really nice when most of these fish undergo the same process right behind that first fin. Going back along the spine. *(Cutting sounds)*

Marie: Crappie fillets.

Sam: Yeah. That'll do.

Some people just love fishing for panfish. They don't really like keeping them. Because it's just so much time and effort to get a little bit of meat off each one. So, if you got the time, do it.

Marie: Any last words of wisdom to share?

Sam: I didn't have it here for this demonstration, but I spend a lot of time on knife care and upkeep. So, I really like to make sure that my knives are just making the job easier for me. So as long as you spend a few extra minutes. I know it sounds maybe simple and straightforward, but just make sure you're sharpening your knives consistently, and it just helps you down the road when, you have a really dull knife, and you maybe have a really tough, bony fish you got to get through, it's just nice to avoid the hassle, and just, it's already ready to go.

Marie: Yeah, it's one of those things that's easy to forget to do, I suppose. *(Laughs)*

Sam: Right, right, you can easily overlook something like that. But, yeah, it takes so much more work when you have a dull blade to get that thing up and where it needs to be, versus, you know, the extra 30 seconds or something to keep it sharp after you're done with every fish, so.

Marie: Well, great. Well, thanks a lot, Sam. *(Laughs)*

Sam: Yeah, thank you so much. Happy to be here.

Music from Zenith City by Woodblind

Marie: Now it's time for the Fish-o-Licious part of our podcast, where we discuss fish recipes that you can find on the Eat Wisconsin Fish website (which is eatwisconsinfish.org). Today I'm cooking "Oh My, Arctic Char." It's a recipe Sharon got off the internet from the Allrecipes.com site before she got indisposed. As I mentioned before, it's really simple, easy and fast.

I've never had the chance to cook char before, much less one filleted in my own kitchen! So, I was looking forward to it.

I'm cooking a lovely arctic char fillet that Sam processed for me, and the only thing I did to it is, there are a few little pin bones from the ribs and so I did a little V cut and cut those out. This recipe, I'm excited, it's the first time I've made it. It looks really easy. You just mix most of the ingredients up in a blender and

put it on the fillet and put it in the oven and it only needs to cook a little bit -- 15 minutes. So, total prep time is 25 minutes.

So, what you need for the recipe is, of course, a fish fillet. It doesn't have to be Arctic char. It can be any kind of white, flaky fish. It could even work on salmon, too; something red. You need some salt, a lime, olive oil, cooking sherry, rosemary, garlic, cayenne pepper, and black pepper.

You just put the fillet on a baking dish lined with foil. You sprinkle it with salt, and then sprinkle it with some lime zest. I'm doing mine with some dried lemon zest that I happen to have because I don't have a fresh lime today. And then you combine the lime juice, olive oil, cooking sherry, rosemary, and garlic in a food processor and pulse it just until the garlic is finely chopped.

Sound of blender.

So that looks good. I'm using store-bought lime juice. And now, I'm brushing this lovely mixture onto the fish fillet. My oven's heated up to 400 degrees already. You'll want to have a pastry brush to put it on the fish, or you could spoon it over the fish too, I suppose.

Then you sprinkle some black pepper on it and a tiny bit of cayenne pepper. What do they say, quarter teaspoon of cayenne pepper? I usually halve it because, you know, I'm from the Midwest and we don't do pepper so well. I'm sprinkling on the cayenne. And then you just pop it in the oven and cook it for 15 minutes.

Sound of a timer beeping.

Setting the timer. This is great for a quick lunch. A quick weekday dinner. Yeah, you can't beat fish for a fast meal.

I can't resist checking on the fish a little bit.

Sound of fish frying inside oven.

Oh, it smells great. You can smell the lime. And reading the recipe a little bit closer, I see that you are also supposed to broil it for a minute or two, right at the end to brown the top of it. And so, this seems like a recipe you wouldn't even need like tartar sauce for it because it's got this nice sauce on it. So, simple, easy. I discovered that my garlic cloves did not get chopped up very well in my food processor. This might not taste as garlicky as it's supposed to, but it sure smells like it's going to be good.

Sound of fish simmering on pan.

So, the fish is out of the oven. It looks great. I didn't broil it, 'cause the top looked cooked just fine. Smells great. Now I'm going to plate it.

Sound of ceramic plates scraping on countertop.

And because Sharon is ill, my husband Russ has volunteered to be a taste tester. He will be offering a second opinion here.

Okay, here we go. (*Sound of forks scraping a plate.*) Ooh, there's a little cayenne afterbite there. (*Laughs*) It's pretty good. It doesn't taste as limey as it smelled. Kind of leaves your mouth warm.

Russ: Mm hmm.

Marie: But not too bad. Not too warm. What do you think, Russ?

Russ: I like it. I'd be curious to know what would happen if you'd been able to grind up that garlic a little finer.

Marie: Mm hmm.

Russ: Oh yeah, there's a little...

Marie: Afterburn.

Russ: Afterburn, yeah. It's light, fluffy, tasty.

Marie: Yeah, if you're averse to pepper, cayenne, I'd maybe leave that out, but yeah, I'd try this again.

Russ: Yeah, the more I eat of it, the more I like it.

Marie: Yes, usually you get char in a restaurant. It's not often you get to eat it at home.

Russ laughs

Marie: This is a treat. Any other reactions? It's almost gone. He's on his last two pieces.

Russ: I'd be happy to have it again.

Music from Zenith City by Woodblind

Marie: That's it for this episode of The Fish Dish. Thanks goes to Sam Peterson and his colleagues with the Wisconsin DNR for the walleye and burbot, and our colleagues at UW-Stevens Point Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility for the Arctic char, and to Dale Krueger for the crappies, and Russ for taste-testing.

Thank you for listening, and remember to sharpen your fillet knife!