

# Smoked Goldeye Burgers

By David Schmetterling | Preparation time: 7-8 days (drying, brining) | Smoking time: 5-6 hours | Cooking time: 8 minutes | Serves 2-3



If you ever fish the lower Missouri or Yellowstone rivers, you'll definitely catch goldeye—whether you want to or not. These aggressive native fish, which resemble herrings, will eat almost anything they can get their little toothy mouth around, from a dry fly to a large chunk of cut bait. They're fun to catch on light tackle or a fly rod.

Most anglers in Montana release these foot-long fish, having heard the flesh is bony and mushy.

It is, if not handled right. But in other parts of North America, goldeye are a prized food fish, especially when smoked. Smoked goldeye are an iconic food of Manitoba. Fort Peck Reservoir once had a commercial fishery for the species.

Each spring when I go catfishing, I keep a dozen or so goldeye for the smoker. Just like with a pronghorn, once you kill a goldeye you want to quickly cool it down. I gut mine but otherwise keep them whole. A bottle cap screwed to a dowel works well for scraping off the scales before the fish go into a cooler on ice. This keeps the flesh firm.

Once home, I brine whole fish for three days, then rinse, pat dry, and keep them in the refrigerator to dry out for another four or five days before smoking. This ensures formation of the thin, shiny glaze, called a pellicle, on the skin. I smoke the fish for about five to six hours over apple wood, starting at 140 degrees F and gradually increasing the temperature each hour to 175 degrees F for the last hour.

After cooling the fish to room temperature, you can eat them as is. I like to flake off a couple of cups of meat, make it into patties, and grill them like burgers, served with all the fixings.

—David Schmetterling is the FWP Fisheries Research Program coordinator in Missoula.

## INGREDIENTS

### Brine

- 1 gallon water
- ½ c. soy sauce
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 3-5 cloves of garlic, diced
- 1 c. kosher salt
- ½ c. brown sugar
- ¼ c. maple syrup
- 2 T. ground black pepper
- 2 T. dill
- 1 T. rosemary
- 1 t. thyme
- 12 bay leaves

### Burgers

- 2 c. flaked, smoked goldeye
- 3 beaten eggs
- 1 c. breadcrumbs
- 2 T. minced onion
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 t. hot sauce
- Salt and pepper to taste

## DIRECTIONS

Combine brine ingredients in a large stock pot or saucepan, heat, and stir to dissolve. Let cool.

Add the whole (gutted and descaled) goldeye. Stir once per day for three days. Remove the goldeye and rinse them in cold water and pat dry (inside and out).

Dry and smoke (see instructions at left).

After smoking, flake the meat off the bone and combine with the other burger ingredients in a bowl. Form into 4 or 5 patties and grill about 4 minutes per side. Serve as you would any burger. ■

