

Perch Piccata

By Jim Pashby | Preparation time: 10 minutes | Cooking time: 10 minutes | Serves 4



INGREDIENTS

- 2 T. olive oil
- 4 to 6 white fish fillets, about 1½ pounds total
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ c. flour
- ¼ c. white wine
- 3 T. lemon juice
- 2 T. capers
- 2 T. butter
- 2 T. chopped fresh parsley

DIRECTIONS

Heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat.

While the pan is heating, blot the fillets dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

Dredge in the flour, shaking off any excess.

Sauté the fish in the oil until just cooked through, about 4 minutes, flipping halfway through. Remove the fish to a platter.

Deglaze the pan with the white wine, whisking for about 1 minute. Add the lemon juice and capers and stir. Add the butter and whisk to bring the sauce together.

Pour onto the fish and garnish with the chopped parsley.

I love to fly-fish coldwater streams and rivers for trout. But as someone who grew up in the Midwest, I still have a soft spot for catching warmwater fish.

The thing is, most perch, walleye, bass, and other warmwater species live in lakes, and I don't own a boat. During summer, fish head to deep water, far beyond my reach. Except in spring and late fall, when they're near shore, I can't catch them.

Thank goodness for Montana's freezing temperatures, which turn lake surfaces to ice and allow anglers like me to walk right out to where the fish are.

Yellow perch are Montana's most popular and widely caught fish during winter. Abundant in ponds, lakes, and reservoirs across Montana, these cousins to walleye and sauger bite readily. Popular perch fisheries include Nelson and Holter Reservoirs, Lakes Placid and Mary Ronan, Tiber Reservoir, and Flathead and Nevada Lakes.

Getting started in ice fishing is easier and cheaper than you might think. For gear, you'll need a small spinning reel and a short jigging rod—sporting goods stores sell combo rigs for about \$30. You'll also need 4-pound-test line, a few ice fishing jigs, some maggots, and a plastic hole skimmer.

To find the best fishing spots, look for portable ice houses and anglers on stools. Ice anglers are friendly, so don't be shy about asking for advice.

Drill holes with a hand auger, which will run around \$50. Or buy one that attaches to an 18-volt cordless drill and bores holes in seconds. During the many years when I lacked a drill of my own, I use the openings created by other anglers the day before. I'd bring a hammer to break up the skim ice that had formed overnight.

Perch are delicious, with white, flaky meat. But they aren't big. Keepers run about 8 to 12 inches, so you'll need to catch a half-dozen or so, depending on the size, to feed four people.

This easy piccata recipe is a great way to prepare a mess of fillets. It also works well for walleye, drum, bass, and other freshwater species, as well as grocery store fish such as cod, tilapia, flounder, and snapper. 🐟

—Jim Pashby is a writer in Helena.

