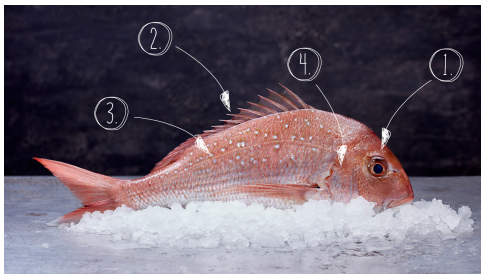
COOKING PASSION SINCE 1877



How to tell if a fish is fresh

Ingredients

Method

Choosing a good fish is about using your senses! Sight, smell and touch are the ready reckoners for what is fresh, use them and you won't go wrong.

1. Check the eyes for clarity
Before you handle the fish, check the eyes. They should be clear, plump and shiny, not sunken or cloudy. If the eyes look good, you can be pretty sure that the fish is fresh and healthy. Some fish eyes can have a slightly cloudy appearance even when they are spanking fresh (like Barramundi, Kingfish and Mackerel) mostly due to them being quickly chilled in ice after harvest, so when checking their eyes look for plump, wet and shiny!

2. Smell the fish
A fresh fish should smell like mineral water or even cucumbers – it certainly shouldn't smell like swamp water or have strong earthy, ammonia or 'fishy' odours. Cooking won't remove these, more likely it'll actually enhance them.

3. Touch the flesh
If the fish monger allows it, give the fish a little poke... when pressed, the flesh should be resilient to the touch, it should spring back immediately like you were pressing on your own flesh. The outside of the fish should be covered in a clean, translucent slime and should look like a clean sheen. Scales should be completely covering the skin, if they are loose or missing this is an indication of age or temperature abuse.

4. Check the gills
Fish gills are an excellent indicator of quality. When first caught, the gills are bright red but slowly darken over time so the brighter the colour, the fresher the fish. Like the flesh of the fish, the gills should also feel clean and cold, not slimy.

I prefer buying a whole fish over fillets as you can use the techniques above to ensure that what you're buying is the best possible quality. If you prefer a fillet, be sure to ask your fishmonger to 'Dry Fillet' your fish, that is to fillet the fish without using or immersing the fish in fresh water. This might require you to gently wipe the flesh with damp cloth (ideally dipped in salt water) before using it but will guarantee maximum flavour!

Notes

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