



Billingsgate Seafood School

Spring forward is in the air, on land and in the sea.

Welcome to the first Billingsgate Seafood School seasonal newsletter giving an update on life at Billingsgate and what is the seasonal best at this time of the year.

With the vibrant greens in the hedgerows and the garden back to life, the colder months are behind us and we have the best of the year to come. While these very visual signs are very easy for us to see on land, similar changes are a foot under the waves. Annual spawning or breeding seasons for fish around our coast are now well under way. Longer and warmer days encourage the microscopic plants of sea to bloom. This provides energy for the next generation of fish to grow.

So why is this important when choosing the best fish to eat during these early spring months?

To produce their roe, fish will use fats and protein from their flesh. This can mean that when fish are in roe condition much of goodness is within the roe (eat this and enjoy), leaving the flesh thin and watery. We discuss this 'seasonality' to greater or lesser extent on all the training courses available at the School and an understanding of how and why fish go through this 'eating quality' variation is vital when selecting your supper. A couple of questions will help to define this, when do fish spawn and are all types of fish affected?

The main trigger for spawning in the northern hemisphere is an increase in temperature, with others such as salinity and abundance of food also important. If the winter is mild like this year fish will spawn earlier. A good example of this was the early spawning of the plaice this year.

This has seen most of the plaice around our coast finishing their breeding by March and now some six weeks later these fish are now coming back into condition. This does vary year to year and is not set in stone.

Are all fish affected by loss of condition during spawning? The short answer is yes, but some fish like those produced through aquaculture are selectively bred to be quick to grow and are young

when marketed, not old enough to produce roe. Therefore, if you are looking for reliable good choices to make when wild fish are spawning think about farmed fish. There are some great choices you can make with UK choices being top of my list. My top choices for farmed fish would be rainbow trout from southern England (Test Valley Trout and Trafalgar Fisheries are two good names to ask for), Anglesey Sea Bass a more local choice than the farms from Greece and Turkey together with and British Tilapia from the Fish Company, produce product that reaches the Market overnight and are fantastically fresh.

Don't discount wild fish at this time of the year but you do need to be aware of the variations in eating quality due to spawning. Some of those fish that are early to breed like the plaice are already getting back into condition. Generally fish will take about six to eight weeks after spawning to build their condition back. There are many helpful fish buying guides available one of the best I have seen recently is in Monty Hall's 'Fisherman's Apprentice' book which combines seasonality with sustainability information from the Marine Conservation Society.

SPRING OFFER

We have a new half day (morning class) taking place on 14th June. Seafood Workshop Mornings will guide you through a selection of dishes to enjoy for lunch and something to take away. During this course you will prepare a Seafood Mezze Platter (Taramasalata, Char-grilled Squid with Smoked Paprika, Balsamic Mackerel fillets, Scallops with Chorizo) to enjoy for lunch or take away.

For more information and bookings visit us at: www.seafoodtraining.org