

# Your Basic, All-Purpose Fish Fry

## Steady Eddy shares his chef's secret.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

When Steady Eddy finished telling us how to cook a fish (look for his recipe in next week's Isthmus), he said we really ought to include a recipe for how to fry a fish, and he just happened to have one on him that was "a beaut." He said it was your basic, all-purpose, heavy-duty recipe for frying fish.

"This is a very simple, simple recipe for frying fish," Steady said. "A chef's secret. I got it from Doug Gedko when

we were up in Canada a couple of years ago. Doug was a very good cook. I shouldn't say 'was' because he still is. He did hotel cooking and dormitory cooking, and he could really fix you a shore lunch that beat eating in town.

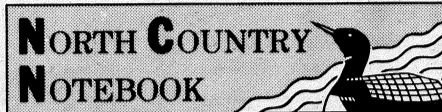
"Doug took just your ordinary flour, and he sprinkled on some seasoning salt. That's it. That's the chef's secret.

"Some people like to put their flour in a brown paper bag and then drop the raw fillets in there and shake them up, and that's a good way. But a lot of chefs think it's more genteel to put the flour in a bowl and roll your fillets around in there. Whatever works for you. The main thing is to get the fillets all powdered up so you can't see a speck of flesh.

"You dip those fillets in the flour and they're ready for the pan.

"Use a deep frying pan—an inch and three-quarters to two inches—and put Crisco oil in the pan. *Only Crisco oil!* I've tried 'em all, and Crisco just works the best. Get that no-fat, no-cholesterol Crisco—it's great!

"Dip your fillets in the flour and just put them in that hot oil. Fry them until



they're golden brown. Then take them out of the pan, put them flat on a clean towel.

"I'll tell you—that seasoning salt in the flour is all the flavoring you are ever going to want. This works on

walleye pike, northern pike, perch, crappie, bluegills, sunfish. It works on everything, and I don't care if you're doin' catfish. It'll work on them, too."

Steady said that as long as he was giving away chef's secrets, he had a couple more, but these weren't from Doug Gedko.

There are only so many ways you can fix fish, Steady allows, but a lot of people have a special little thing they do with fish, and he had a couple of additional recipes where folks had done their special little things.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "You should nose around and print them up in this column. Give it a little class. You could send the folks a little something if their special recipe got printed in your funny paper. I'd be glad to run the recipes through our test kitchen to see how they worked out in real life."

To give us an idea of what he had in mind, Steady said that even as a lot of folks prepared their brats for the grill by cooking them in beer, a lot of folks also cooked their fish in beer. He said there was a beer batter for fish fillets that he found in a little paperback titled *Great Cooking Outdoors*, by Gale Holsman and Beverly Holsman, published by Bantam Books. Steady said that the recipe contained the warning: *Fish fillets prepared in this batter may become habit forming—you can't eat just one.*

This is the Holsman formula for the beer batter: "In a bowl, combine 1 cup buttermilk pancake mix and 3/4 cup beer. Blend with a fork until smooth and the consistency of heavy cream. Blot the fillets dry and dip in the batter. Deep-fat fry until golden brown on the outside—should be between 1 1/2 to 2 minutes. The meat should be moist and shiny on the inside. *Do not overcook the fish.* It is advisable to test fry a small piece first."

Cooking with fish in beer may strike some as yet another Wisconsin anomaly, but how about cooking fish in brandy? As Peter and Lou Berryman have long told us: Yah, hey. In Squirrely Valley.

"Brandied Yellow Perch," Steady Eddy intoned. "It's a recipe from *The American Heritage Book of Fish Cookery* by Alice Houston, who with her husband Jim owned a fishing camp in the pristine wilds of British Columbia. Her recipe calls for six perch about 10 inches long (I think it would work with 12 perch about six inches long), 3 teaspoons salt, 4 tablespoons melted butter, 3 fennel sprigs, coarsely chopped. And 1/2 cup brandy.

"1. In an outdoor grill or fireplace, start a wood or charcoal fire and burn until there are hot coals.

"2. Sprinkle each perch with salt inside and out and roll in melted butter. Save the rest of the melted butter for basting.

"3. Place fish in a hinged wire grill and cook over hot coals 6 to 8 minutes, turning and basting once. Perch are done when flesh turns opaque and flakes easily when tested with a fork.

"4. Place perch side by side in shallow dish and sprinkle with chopped fennel. Warm the brandy, pour it over the fish and set aflame."

Miz Houston claims that this will provide six servings, but she must be thinking in terms of West Coast birdlike appetites and not the buzzard crawls in Squirrely Valley. If you don't gorge at the Friday fish fry, you have no strength—or stomach—for the Saturday polka.

Send your special Wisconsin fish recipe to Steady Eddy here at Isthmus (14 W. Mifflin St., Madison, WI 53703), and if he says, "Great! Print it!" we'll send you *North Country Notebook*—either the book or the cassette tape, you say which. "Or better yet," Steady says, "we'll send you a bag of Beer Nuts." ■