

Large family fish

The bream is one of the largest fish families and, depending on the species, can be pink, blue or grey. The variety of bream found in America is called Porgy, while in France, *dorade* (or *daurade*) is used by some fishmongers for golden glinting fish that have nothing to do with bream at all – in fact, the shiny glittery scales of sea bream are more silvery than golden. As in all large families, some members are better than others, and the sea bream or royal *dorade*, with the brilliant golden crescent between its eyes, has the finest, most delicate flavour. This fish has a bluish white or dark blue back, a white belly and silvery flanks. It is sometimes found in the English Channel, although it mostly lives in the Mediterranean. Other varieties of bream are found in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. All bream have really hard, strong teeth for prising shellfish from the rocks and these, like sharks' teeth, were once believed to possess magical properties. As a result, they were

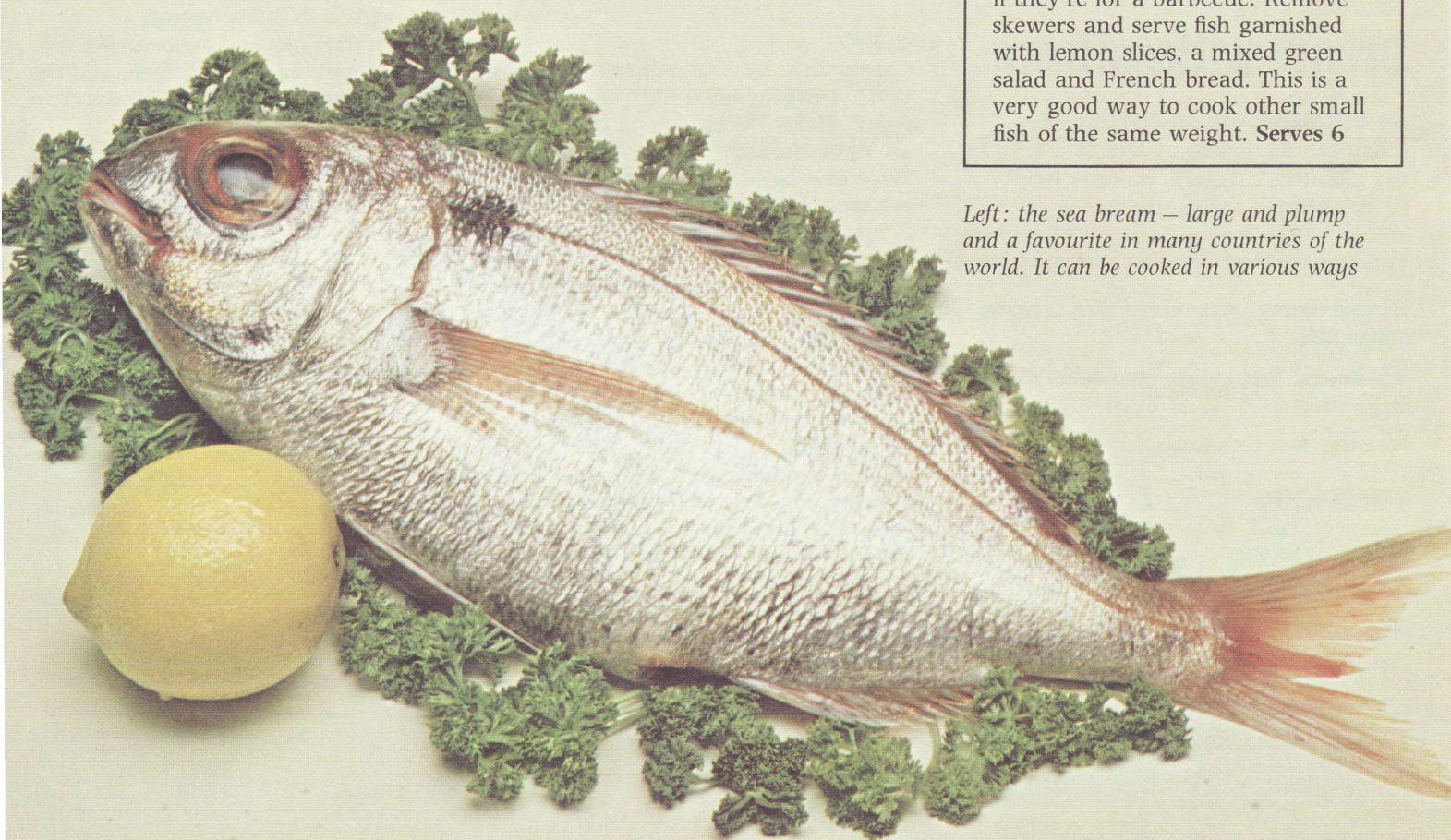
often incorporated in metal tasting cups in the belief that they would change colour when touched by poison. Both the red and grey bream are eaten extensively throughout southern Europe, although the red bream has the best flavour. In Spain and Portugal, bream are known as *sargo* or *pargo*, but the smaller pink relative, *besugo*, lacks the flavour of the larger varieties and also tends to be rather bony.

In one Japanese dish, *sashimi*, sea bream is eaten raw (in the recipe, right, it is grilled). Europeans often use bream as a basis for fish soup and, combined with a variety of shellfish, it makes a delicious main course for a cold winter day. Sea bream can also be steamed, wrapped in foil and baked in the oven with herbs and butter, or casseroled. Fresh bream should have firm flesh, red gills and bright eyes. Sea bream is usually sold scaled and gutted. Freshwater bream or *brème* is similar in appearance to carp, and is mostly found in rivers, lowland lakes and

reservoirs. It is not nearly as well known in the kitchen as its saltwater relative, and is usually caught by anglers. Since most freshwater bream lurk on the river bed, they tend to have rather a muddy flavour. To combat this, soak the fish in cold water and vinegar for 1 hour before cooking. Drain the fish and make sure it is really dry before cooking. You can also improve the flavour and texture of freshwater bream by leaving it in a wine marinade for 2 hours before cooking (recipe under Alcohol, page 6) and serving it with a spicy sauce – brown butter and capers, for example (see Butter).

JAPANESE BREAM

Choose 3 sea bream each weighing about 1½lb (700g). Put scaled and gutted fish (they can usually be bought ready-prepared) on a plate and sprinkle ½oz (15g) salt over each – sea-salt if possible. Leave until just before you cook them – at least 30 minutes – then wipe the fish dry. Thread each fish on to an oiled skewer, from near the eye to the tail, making the fish curve slightly. Rub with some extra salt, then cook under a hot grill for about 4 minutes each side. A charcoal grill is ideal, if they're for a barbecue. Remove skewers and serve fish garnished with lemon slices, a mixed green salad and French bread. This is a very good way to cook other small fish of the same weight. Serves 6



Left: the sea bream – large and plump and a favourite in many countries of the world. It can be cooked in various ways