

2 buckling

Smoked delicacy

Buckling is like the bloaters but has a milder, more delicate flavour.

Freshly smoked fish should be bright and glossy – buckling is a delicious golden colour – and firm to the touch. Originally, smoked fish was a vital source of food, particularly during the winter months. Now it is highly prized for its flavour and considered more a luxury than a standby.

Smoking fish is an art. Gone are the days when fish would be left hanging over the fire for weeks on end – now it is smoked in a matter of hours.

As modern kilns replace the more old-fashioned smoking chimneys, the temperature, humidity and even the flavour and degree of smoke are critically controlled.

Before being smoked, the fish can either be rubbed with coarse salt, or dipped in brine. If any extra colouring is needed this is

when it's added. The fish is dried in gentle heat – if it is too fierce, it will seal the flesh and prevent the smoke penetrating right through.

It's the final smoking, when the fire is damped down with wood shavings and chips, that gives the fish its exquisite flavour and colouring.

The best flavour is obtained from woods like beech and oak. Green wood gives off more smoke than

dry, and some smokers like to vary the fragrance by adding twigs of rosemary, laurel or eucalyptus. Smoked fish are divided into two categories: those which are cold-smoked, like bloaters, kippers, haddock and salmon, when the temperature does not exceed 85F (30C). As a general rule, cold-smoked fish needs additional cooking before eating, although smoked salmon is an exception, and even bloaters can be eaten as they are. With hot-smoked fish like buckling, trout, mackerel, Arbroath smokies and eel, the temperature is high enough to cook the fish at the same time. Buckling is believed to have originated in Germany – the large, bustling port of Hamburg is particularly famous for this favoured delicacy which is widely sought after in the shops and restaurants.

An Austrian speciality is buckling fillets baked with eggs and butter. There is also great demand for buckling in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, and buckling pâté is a popular Scandinavian delicacy. Freshly smoked buckling makes a delicious starter – grill quickly just to heat through, or skin and fillet, and eat as it is. Like most fish, buckling also goes well with salads.



Above: Buckling with lemon

BUCKLING WITH LEMON

Served on a wholemeal bread and a bed of lettuce and with a garnish of lemon slices, buckling makes an excellent starter or light lunch. First, slice 4 buckling in half, making two fillets from each, then remove skin and bones. Trim a small lettuce, wash leaves, drain and dry them carefully on kitchen paper. Cut four large slices of wholemeal bread in half lengthways and spread with 1oz (25g) butter. Place two slices of bread on each of four serving plates and top with lettuce leaves. Arrange two buckling fillets on each dish. Sprinkle the fish with 2 tbsp (2×15ml) lemon juice. Slice 1 large lemon into eight, and garnish each fillet.

Serves 4

Buckling and crab salad

A very pretty dish well suited to a party or informal meal where the guests can help themselves

PARTY OR STARTER

Serves 6

Overall timing 20 minutes

Equipment 2 bowls, piping bag and nozzle (optional)

Freezing Not recommended

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	Vinegar	2×15ml
4 tbsp	Oil	4×15ml
2oz	Chopped onion	50g
2 tbsp	Chopped chives	2×15ml
4½oz	Can of dressed crab	140g
	Salt and pepper	
6	Hard-boiled eggs	6
3	Buckling	3
	Worcestershire sauce	
1 tbsp	Chopped parsley	15ml
12	Capers	12
½	Lettuce	½
1	Large red apple	1
2 tbsp	Lemon juice	2×15ml
½	Orange (optional)	½
	Garnish	
	Shelled prawns	
	Chopped fennel (optional)	

Below: Buckling and crab salad – an appetizing array for a party

