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CRUNCHY OVEN-FRIED FISH

Serves 4. Published September 1, 2008. From Cook's Illustrated.

To prevent overcooking, buy fish fillets at least 1 inch thick. The bread crumbs can be made up to 3 days in advance, cooled, and stored at room temperature in an airtight container. Serve with Sweet and Tangy Tartar Sauce (see related recipe) or lemon wedges.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 large slices [white sandwich bread](#) , torn into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter , melted
- [Table salt and ground black pepper](#)
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves
- 1 small shallot , minced (about 2 tablespoons)
- 1/4 cup plus 5 tablespoons [unbleached all-purpose flour](#)
- 2 large eggs
- 2 teaspoons prepared horseradish (optional)
- 3 tablespoons [mayonnaise](#)
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
- 1 1/4 pounds skinless cod fillet , or haddock fillet, or other thick white fish fillet (1 to 1 1/2 inches thick), cut into 4 pieces (see note)
- Lemon wedges

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Pulse bread, melted butter, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper in food processor until bread is coarsely ground, eight 1-second pulses (you should have about 3 1/2 cups crumbs). Transfer to rimmed baking sheet and bake until deep golden brown and dry, about 15 minutes, stirring twice during baking time. Cool crumbs to room temperature, about 10 minutes. Transfer crumbs to pie plate; toss with parsley and shallot. Increase oven temperature to 425 degrees.
2. Place 1/4 cup flour in second pie plate. In third pie plate, whisk eggs, horseradish (if using), mayonnaise, paprika, cayenne pepper (if using), and 1/4 teaspoon black pepper until combined; whisk in remaining 5 tablespoons flour until smooth.
3. Spray wire rack with nonstick cooking spray and place in rimmed baking sheet. Dry fish thoroughly with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Dredge 1 fillet in flour; shake off excess. Using hands, coat with egg mixture. Coat all sides of fillet with bread crumb mixture, pressing gently so that thick layer of crumbs adheres to fish. Transfer breaded fish to wire rack. Repeat with remaining 3 fillets.
4. Bake fish until instant-read thermometer inserted into centers of fillets registers 140 degrees, 18 to 25 minutes. Using thin spatula, transfer fillets to individual plates and serve immediately with lemon wedges.

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STEP-BY-STEP

Keys to a Crisp Crust Soft, moist fish needs an extra-thick coating of bread crumbs to add flavor and crunch. Here's how we lay it on thick:



1. **Pulse:** Processing fresh crumbs very coarsely maximizes crunch.



2. **Toast:** Prebaking buttered crumbs ensures that they are brown and crisp when fish is done.



3. **Dip:** Thickening batter with flour and mayonnaise prevents toasted crumbs from turning soggy and glues them firmly to fish.



4. **Coat:** Pressing down gently on crumbs helps to pack thick layer on fish.



5. **Elevate:** Baking fish on a wire rack set inside baking sheet allows air to circulate underneath.



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