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# Sea Robin Anyone? Chefs Get Acquainted With Local Seafood

By [KRISTIN GOURLAY \(/PEOPLE/KRISTIN-GOURLAY\)](#) • JUL 22, 2016

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*The humble sea robin sometimes gets thrown back, but chefs insist it's delicious.*

KRISTIN GOURLAY / RIPR



Rhode Island's waters teem with tasty fish. But we're not eating most of them. That's partly because much of it gets shipped overseas, and partly because Rhode Islanders just haven't developed a taste for fish many consider trash – or “bycatch.” A group of chefs, scientists, and fishermen want to change that.



We visited the kitchen at culinary business incubator Hope and Main in Warren to find out what's on the menu.



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*Chefs get acquainted with local seafood.*

Trays full of strange looking fish and shellfish are glistening on ice in this sunny kitchen. Chefs from across Rhode Island arrive, ready to sample, and cook, after a short presentation.

"And here we have butterfish. This is a fish that's caught by trawl, often in conjunction with squid," said Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation head Anna Malek.

While these fish are abundant and local, Malek and others believe they're going to waste. With a little education, she hopes chefs will help create a market for these underutilized species.

"We also have skate wings, we have quahogs that were caught throughout Narragansett Bay," said Malek. "We have long fin squid – so this is our state appetizer here, calamari; these are whelk, or conch; these guys a little bit bigger, these are scup. These guys are sea robin. So this is another common trash fish species."

As the chefs gather, Johnson and Wales University instructor Matt Britt explains the plan.

"The main goal today is to use either underutilized or local Rhode Island fish, and some of this stuff here we've seen before," said Britt. "Some of it you know what it is but you haven't worked with it."

The chefs tie on aprons and pick their fish. Chef Matt Gennuso from Chez Pascal in Providence lifts a giant conger eel out of its ice bath. He hasn't worked with this species before.

"I found it tricky to filet. So one idea I had to was to cook it a salt crust," Geunnuso said. "So it's basically steaming inside the salt crust, then you crack the crust, and I'm thinking you'll be able to pull the skin off and flake the meat."

Chef Ben Mayhew, from Garde de la Mer, has chosen sea robin. It's a white fish with spiny fins like wings.

"I used to catch sea robin when I went fishing with my stepfather," Mayhew mused. "And we used to throw it back, because they're a hideous looking fish."

While he guts the fish, Mayhew says he wants to keep his dish simple.

"I think I'm going to grill some filets, try the meat, very basic."

Chef Joe Simone from Simone's in Warren gravitates toward the squid. He decides to try an Italian dish called squid, or calamari, in zamino.

"I have some mushrooms and garlic and tomato," said Simone "I'm going to stew them in a pan, then I'm going to add the fresh calamari that I'm going to clean while the vegetables are cooking, and then stew it all together with a little wine and a little chili. Does that sound good?"

Yes, yes it does.

Over on the stove, chef Andrew Keintz from North Bakery in Providence is gently boiling some whelks and quahogs, waiting for them to steam open. For the non-native, a quahog is a clam, and a whelk is like a conch.

"I've never worked with these. So it's more of an experiment for me to see what potential lies there for us," said Keintz.

He and his partner decide to slice the whelks thin – that way they don't have to be tenderized – and dress them in citrus.

So can home gourmets find these fish in the local supermarket? Not so much. And that's another issue the Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation is trying to address. The hope is that more of what's caught in Rhode Island gets eaten here, too.

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