



Buying seasonal fish

If you enjoy eating fresh fish but are unsure of how seasonality affects their sustainability, the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) has produced the following handy guide to the best choices for those fresh, wild caught fish that we rate at 1, 2, or 3.

Avoid buying fish during their breeding or spawning times, the 'red' months, and below the size at which they mature. Buy fish during the 'green' months, these months are outside the breeding season and the best time to enjoy eating them.

Avoiding eating immature or baby fish and fish during their breeding or spawning times will help maintain stock levels.

Please note seasonality table only applies to fresh (not frozen or tinned) fish, as fish that are frozen at sea or tinned can take some time to reach the consumer. Spawning times can also vary, for example with latitude and sea temperature.

- **Buy fish**
- **Avoid buying fish**

This guide is designed to help you increase the sustainability of the fish you eat, by choosing fish at the right time of year. To find out the Marine Conservation Society's seafood sustainability ratings, visit www.goodfishguide.org.uk

Seasonality table



Size matters



| Fish Name  | Sea area  | Length / age at maturity  | EU or other Minimum Landing Size(MLS)  | Best choice, ask for...  |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| Bib or pouting | Central Eastern Atlantic | 21-25cm / 1-2 years | Taken as bycatch in trawl fisheries | Line-caught where available |
| Black sea bream or porgy | East Atlantic | 20cm / 2-3 years | 23cm (Cornwall Sea Fisheries) | Cornish line or net-caught fish above 23cm but below 40cm (this will help protect mature male fish) |
| Brown trout | North East Atlantic | Whitling or small sea trout 36-41cm / 2-3 years; Brown or resident trout 27-30cm (depending on area) / 2-3 years | For local information visit: www.environment-agency.gov.uk | Fish from licensed net or trap fisheries only |
| Clam, carpet or venus shell | North East Atlantic | 10mm / 1 year | 40mms (except Skagerrak & Kattegat) | Clams that are manually harvested e.g. hand gathered or raked |
| Clam, razor | North East Atlantic | Above 100mm | 100mm | Clams that are manually harvested e.g. hand gathered or raked; above 130mm |
| Cockle | North East Atlantic | 15-20mm / 18 months | Varies with area e.g. Solway Firth 30mm | MSC labelled or hand-raked cockles from sustainably harvested fisheries only |
| Cod, Atlantic | North East Atlantic (North Sea) | 60-70cms (50cm / 4-5 years) | 35cm (30cm in Skagerrak/Kattegat) | Line-caught if available from sustainable stocks* Ensure fish caught by long-line is 'seabird - friendly' |

| Fish Name | Sea area | Length / age at maturity | EU or other Minimum Landing Size(MLS) | Best choice, ask for... |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--|--|--|
| Coley or saithe | North East Atlantic | 50cm | 30cm | Line-caught where available from sustainable stocks* |
| Crab, brown or edible | North East Atlantic | 120mm / 7-8 years | 115-140mm (shell or carapace width depending on area of capture) | Pot-caught. Avoid eating egg bearing or berried female crabs and crab claws, unless they have been removed after landing |
| Crab, spider | North East Atlantic | 85mm males; 70mm females | 120 mm (max. shell width) | Pot-caught |
| Dab | North East Atlantic | 10-20cm / 2-3 years (males); 20-25cm / 3-5 years (females) | 15cm (Cornwall Sea Fisheries District) | Seine netted fish where available |
| Dover Sole | North East Atlantic | 25-35cm / 3-5 years | 24cm | MSC certified Dover sole from eastern English Channel |
| Dublin Bay prawn or langoustine | North East Atlantic | 29-46mm / 4-5 years (males); 21-34mm / 3-4 years (females) | 70-85mm total length depending on area of capture. | Pot or creel-caught. Trawl fisheries are associated with large quantities of bycatch |
| Flounder | North East Atlantic | 20-25cm / 2-3 years (males); 25-30cm / 3-4 years (females) | 25cm (Cornwall Sea Fisheries District) | Trap and fixed net. Also by-caught in trawl nets |
| Grey gurnard | North East Atlantic | 18cm / 3 years (males); 24cm / 4 years (females) | Taken as bycatch in trawl nets | Fish above 24cm |
| Haddock | North East Atlantic | 30-40cm / 3-4 years (North Sea); 40-70cm / 6-10 years (Norway) | 30cm (27cm in Skagerrak/Kattegat) | Line-caught fish from sustainable stocks* Ensure fish caught by long-line is 'seabird-friendly' |
| Hake | North East Atlantic | 50cm / 5-6 years (females) | 27cm (30cm in Skagerrak/Kattegat) | Line or net-caught fish from Northern stocks only |
| Herring or sild | North East Atlantic | 30cm / 2-5 years | 20cm (18cm in Skagerrak/Kattegat) | Fish from MSC certified fisheries in Thames Blackwater and the eastern English Channel |
| Lemon sole | North East Atlantic | 20-30cm / 3-6 years | 25cm (Cornwall Sea Fisheries District) | Seine or otter-trawled fish landed in Cornwall |

| Fish Name | Sea area | Length / age at maturity | EU or other Minimum Landing Size(MLS) | Best choice, ask for... |
|---|----------------------------|--|---|---|
| Lobster | North East Atlantic | 75-80mm carapace length / 5-7 years (female) | 87mm carapace length (78mm in Skagerrak/ Kattegat) | Pot-caught. Avoid eating berried or egg-bearing females |
| Lythe or pollack | North East Atlantic | 50cm | 30cm | Line-caught fish from Cornish waters. Visit: www.linecaught.org.uk |
| Mackerel | North East Atlantic | 3 years | 20cm (30cm in North Sea) | Fish caught using traditional methods such as hand lines, ring and driftnets and certified by MSC |
| Mussel | North East & West Atlantic | 1-2 years | 45-51mm depending on local Sea Fishery Committee Bylaws | Wild hand-gathered or farmed e.g. rope grown |
| Pilchard (above 15cm) or sardine (below 15cm) | North East Atlantic | 15cm /12 months | 11cm | Fish above 15cm (known as pilchards) caught using traditional driftnets from MSC certified fisheries |
| Plaice | North East Atlantic | 30-34cm | 22cm (27cm in Skagerak/ Kattegat) | Otter-trawled from sustainable stocks* |
| Northern or cold-water prawn | North East Atlantic | 2-3cm | None | Fish trawled with nets fitted with sorting grids only |
| Red gurnard | North East Atlantic | 20cm | Taken as bycatch in trawl fisheries | Fish above 20cm |
| Red mullet | North East Atlantic | 16cm | 15cm (Cornwall Sea Fisheries District) | Fish above 16cm |

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|----------------|---------------------|---|---|--|
| Scallop, king | North East Atlantic | 80-90mm / 3 years | 10mm / 110mm in northern Irish Sea | Dive-caught |
| Scallop, queen | North East Atlantic | 40-50mm / 18 months - 2 years | 40mm | Dive or trap caught |
| Seabass | North East Atlantic | 31-35cm / 3-6 year (males); 40-45cm / 5-8 year (females) | 36cm in EU waters (37.5cm in some coastal areas of England and Wales) | Line-caught and tagged from SW England. Visit: www.linecaught.org.uk |
| Whelk | North East Atlantic | 55-74cm / 5-7 years | 45mm | Pot-caught |

* For information on which stocks are sustainable for individual species use the Search facility in Fishonline.

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