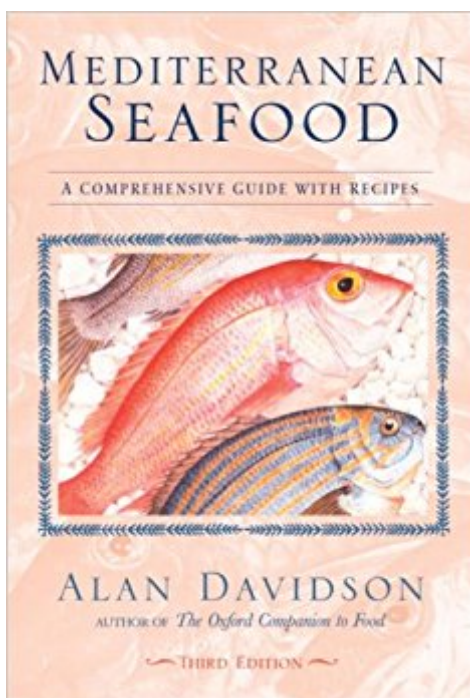


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Mediterranean Seafood: A Comprehensive Guide With Recipes



Synopsis

Mediterranean seafood is a topic as vast as the riches of that fabled sea itself. Written by distinguished food historian Alan Davidson (author of *The Oxford Companion to Food*), **MEDITERRANEAN SEAFOOD** is a seminal work of culinary scholarship. The new edition catalogs edible marine life and provides identifications in a dozen languages and over 100 line drawings. Davidson puts knowledge into practice with 240 skillfully presented recipes, culled from cuisines throughout the region. Davidson's work possesses the quixotic charm of the true enthusiast; his practical discussions are enlivened by touches of witty erudition that will delight those new to the subject, as well as readers steeped in the biology and culinary traditions of the Mediterranean.

• The original edition won the prestigious Glenfiddich Award for best food book and was translated into five languages.

• An essential reference for the gastronomically inclined traveler (or English-speaking resident) wishing to know more about the seafood found in the markets, kitchens, and restaurants of the Mediterranean region.

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Davidson has a gift for conveying memorable information in a way so effortless that his book makes lively reading for its own sake. -Elizabeth David "This is at once a delight to read, a piece of original and profound scholarship, and an impressively practical cookery book. . . . It is almost an impertinence to praise anything done as well as **MEDITERRANEAN SEAFOOD**." -The Spectator

• The original edition won the prestigious Glenfiddich Award for best food book and was translated into five languages. • An essential reference for the gastronomically inclined traveler (or English-speaking resident) wishing to know more about the seafood found in the markets, kitchens, and restaurants of the Mediterranean region.

The book arrived promptly and in good condition. The problem with the book is that much of the seafood written about is difficult to find in the United States. For someone living in Europe, it would be terrific.

‘Mediterranean Seafood’ and ‘North Atlantic Seafood’, both by noted culinary writer Alan Davidson, the author of ‘The Oxford Companion to Food’ are reference books which a serious cook must have in their library where time is spent deciding on what to eat rather than time spend actually cooking. These books belong to a rare breed of books in English such as Elizabeth Schneider’s ‘Vegetables from Amaranth to Zucchini’ or ‘Bruce Cost’s Asian Ingredients’ which thoroughly cover a broad single subject or the ‘Larousse Gastronomique’ which gives an overview of virtually every culinary subject, at least from the point of view of French cuisine. Both books are organized in the same way that gives primacy to information on the aquatic species and secondary coverage of recipes. Biological family, genus, and species organize the first part on the catalog of species in order that the biological similarity of the fishes is clearly shown. Each article gives the most common English name, the two part Latin scientific name, the scientist who assigned this name (most commonly the great inventor of biological Taxonomy, Linnaeus), the biological family name, and the common name of the fish in virtually every language of the major fishing nationality bordering the relevant body of water. The North Atlantic species, for example, are named in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, German, Polish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and others such as Gaelic (Irish). The Mediterranean species’ names are given in French, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Tunisian, Turkish, and others such as Bulgarian, Romanian, and Russian if, for example, the species is most commonly found in the Black Sea, which is included in the coverage of the Mediterranean. These names in themselves are entertaining to the linguistically inclined, as it is interesting to see the similarities and differences from country to country. For example, even though the Turks came to Asia Minor from central Asia, most of their names for fishes are very similar to the Greek name, making a lot of sense, as a traveling people is likely to name things new to them based on the names given by the indigenous population. The articles on every species also have a highly detailed black and white drawing of each animal. The great value to these is that it makes comparing the appearance of

different fishes very easy, as every species is depicted in a similar style. It is too bad they could not be depicted to scale, but this would have had the sturgeon filling two pages while the anchovies would be the size of a period. Instead, the remarks on each fish give the average market length and a description of the typical color and markings. The catalog entry also gives a paragraph or two on cuisine, which is a discussion of the culinary desirability of the species and typical ways in which the animal is prepared. For most fish, this includes methods by which the fish is butchered. The catalog entries also include a list of recipes and page numbers for these recipes in the second major section of the book. The second major section divides recipes by country. The Mediterranean volume has chapters of recipes from Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, the Black Sea, and Northern Africa. The North Atlantic volume has recipes from Portugal, Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, the United States, Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales. France merits two sections, covering the southwest and the northwest. The US merits four sections, covering New England, the Middle Atlantic States, the Chesapeake, and the Carolinas and Georgia. Other books, such as 'Fish' by Shirley King seems to have copied this scheme, but seems to be much less successful in that not enough valuable information is packed into the catalogue to make it interesting enough reading to outweigh the annoyance of doing a two step search for a recipe on haddock, for example. The other side of the coin is that if you live in Maryland, you are much more likely to be interested in recipes from the Chesapeake than in recipes from Maine. One is tempted to expect these recipes to be very generic and not as interesting as those you may find in books of 'haute cuisine' from a fish specialist such as Eric Ripert. This is partially true. Davidson is less the great cook than he is a great writer on food. This means that while his recipes may come from common sources, he gives us much more information on the background of the recipes than the chef may do. Two perfect examples of this case are the recipes for bouillabaisse (French fish stew) and Maryland crab cakes. Davidson confesses to giving us something simpler than the 'de luxe version', yet this simple treatment is entirely appropriate to the simple origins of the dish, before the gourmets got their hands on it. Similarly, the crab cake recipe has very few ingredients, mostly just crabmeat, seasonings, breadcrumbs, and enough egg to hold it all together. The supplementary information tells much about the fish cuisine of both regions. The most interesting information is on the fact that while the Mediterranean is very shallow, it has relatively little continental shelf while the North Sea is practically all shelf, suitable to the spawning of young fish in shallow water. This does much to explain the popularity of the North Atlantic cod in peninsular Italy, virtually surrounded by water. The bibliography shows that the author has based most of his material on local sources in native

languages such as Polish, Turkish, and Portuguese. This may only help the multilingual scholar, but then it is the rare English culinary work that does this. One of the greatest things about these volumes is that all of this great material is available in trade paperbacks, which list for no more than \$25. These are must have books for devoted foodies!

All the commonly-eaten fish and shellfish of the Mediterranean are covered in this wonderful reference and cookbook. As in his *Atlantic Seafood*, each animal's entry includes an old engraving (better than a photo for identification -- except for color), its scientific and common names in various languages, a description of the animal's habits and culinary qualities, and a reference to recipes. Recipes are organized by country, and are well chosen and edited. The only criticism I might offer is that it is hard to find recipes by type. That is, it's very easy to find recipes for mackerel or recipes from Italy, but it's hard to find all the baked-fish recipes suitable for a dark-fleshed fish. A great book like this should never be out of print! It's one of my favorite gifts for friends in Greece and Italy....

Just before his untimely death, this year, Alan Davidson received the highly prestigious Erasmus Prize for European culture, for his publications on food. This book, along with his *Companion* and other publications, is a classic. It is crammed full of useful and necessary information. The fish section describes a species, its latin name, and the names in various other languages in the region. The recipe section deals in an intelligent way with regional knowns and unknowns, such as a sensible discussion on bouillabaisse. Any serious library of cookbooks has to have Davidson's books, including this one.

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