

# From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen A Fish By Any Other Name

May 24, 1984 VILLAGE ADVERTISER

by Lydia Lovell

Spring comes, not like "fog on little cat feet," but to shouts of glee. A boy cuts for his mother an armful of whips bearing the gray catkins of pussy willow. A little girl plucks for her grandmother a nosegay of arbutus. Or the kitchen door bursts open and exciting news brings the whole family to its feet.

"The herring are running!" And off they all go, grabbing buckets and nets on their way. Herring runs are found on certain little rivers that rush toward the sea from spring-fed freshwater ponds. Here the alewives return every spring to spawn. Best known are the herring runs in Bournedale and Brewster, but both Marstons Mills and Mashpee boast them, too.

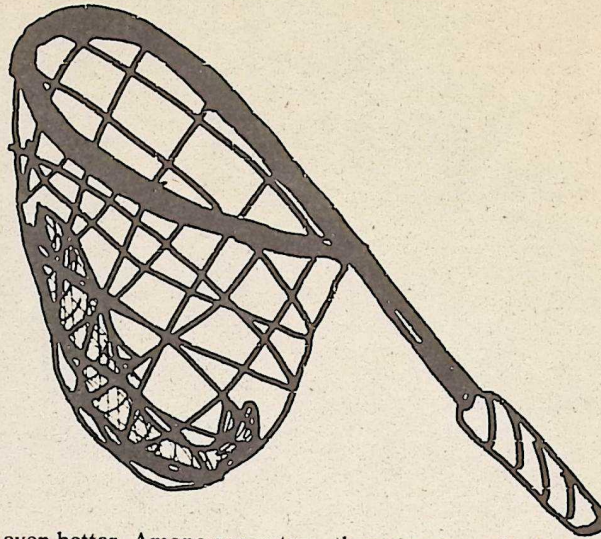
Unlike returning sparrows that apparently have biological clocks closely attuned to our calendars, the herring begin their upstream battle only when water temperatures rise to a proper degree. If ice clings to rims of ponds later than usual, if cloudy skies prevent sunshine from warming the waters or if cold northeast storms sweep ashore one upon the heels of the last throughout April, the herring delay their run. The fish hang back in the salty surf until fresh water mingling with the ocean brine warms enough to carry the magnet-like scent of home that draws a herring back to the same pond where, four years earlier, it hatched.

With the cry, "The herring are running," all hands take part in gathering the catch. If the fish are running well, their bodies crowd the shallow stream and their fins break the surface, shining and glittering like silver in the sunlight. If the fish are running well, the streambanks are patrolled by sea gulls as well as lined with men, women and children armed with dipnets. If the fish are running well, a family can take all it can use in less than an hour's time while the herring struggle upstream against the waters' flow.

At home again with finny harvest, the fish are cleaned, the roes carefully removed from bellies of females. Then some fish are discarded in the compost heap or buried in the garden; and some, washed thoroughly, are laid down in salt to cure. Herring are among the boniest of fishes, and only the most experienced gourmet attempts eating salt herring, but Uncle Henry was one who, all his life, enjoyed salt herring for his breakfast.

Most members of the Lovell family, however, content themselves with eating herring roe. To us, dedicated as we are, herring roe possesses a flavor unparalleled in delicacy. The alewife (which is the real name for the fish we call herring) is related to the shad, a fish that follows a pattern of behavior similar to that of our herring but in rivers south of Cape Cod. Shad roe tastes something like herring roe, but its eggs, those tender mealy grains encased in thin membrane, are larger and stronger in flavor. The lover of shad roe herring finds herring roe insipid; the lover of herring roe thinks shad-roe overwhelming.

For six people who have been whetting their appetites for a taste of herring roe for nearly a year, a pound-and-a-half is not too large a quantity to prepare. Two pounds might be



even better. Among roe-eaters, there are two schools. There are those who swear doing more to them than simmering the roes gently in salted water ruins them. And there are those to whom that process is but the first step and who go on to prepare **Broiled Herring Roe**.

Lay two pounds of roe, every-so-gently, in a shallow pan of boiling water. Simmer for five minutes. With a slotted spoon, lift the roes, ever-so-carefully, from the cooking water and place on an oiled broiling pan. Brush with melted butter and run under the broiler quickly, just long enough to give them color, but not long enough to cook them further for that would toughen them.

Shad-roe eaters are usually unanimous in their opinions that roe should be broiled after boiling. The shad is a larger fish than alewife, it grows in larger rivers, and its roe is usually more than double the size of a herring's roe. The roe from one shad makes a serving for one person. Preparing shad roe for broiling is a process similar to fixing herring roe, except the stronger taste can stand some competition in **Broiled Shad Roe**.

Six pair of shad roe  
1 t. salt  
12 slices crisp-cooked bacon

1 lemon, sliced  
4 T. butter, melted

Lower roes gently into pan of boiling water to which salt and lemon slices have been added. Simmer for five minutes until roe is cooked through. With a slotted spoon, lift roes from water being as careful as possible not to break their casings. Place the drained roes on a greased, pre-heated broiling pan and brush with melted butter. Broil until golden brown but still soft. Sprinkle with crumbled crisp bacon and serve hot.

To accompany either herring or shad roe, boiled potatoes seasoned with rosemary are the perfect choice. Peel a dozen medium-sized Irish potatoes and boil for 20 minutes. Drain, add two tablespoons of butter or margarine and a teaspoon of crushed fresh rosemary needles to the saucepan. Cover and return to low heat for five minutes, shaking the pan occasionally. Remove cover and allow potatoes to brown in melted butter.

If tossed green salad fails to meet your standards with this special fish dinner, perhaps whole kernel corn would be a better choice. Maybe though, depending upon the size of appetites in your family, two vegetables are preferred. **Bean Salad** is an excellent choice for a side dish; the sweet-sour marinade enhances fish flavors.

3/4 C. sugar  
1/3 C. salad oil  
2/3 C. cider vinegar  
1 t. salt  
dash of pepper

1 C. green string beans  
1 C. yellow wax beans  
1/4 C. chopped onion  
2/3 C. chopped celery  
1 C. kidney beans

Boil fresh green and yellow beans for 20 minutes or use canned beans. Use canned kidney beans. Parboil celery and onions for 10 minutes, pour into a sieve and drain well. Bring sugar, oil, and vinegar to a boil. Remove from heat, add salt and pepper. Cool. Combine vegetables with marinade and refrigerate at least two hours before serving.

Following a dinner of such quality, dessert must live up to all that has gone before. Apple desserts have always been favorites among the Lovells, with deep-dish apple pie winning first place in the top ten. Running a close second, and easier to prepare, is **Apple Crisp**. This is how Aunt Olivia taught me to make it.

3 C. apple sauce  
3 slices white bread  
butter or margarine

2 t. cinnamon  
1 t. nutmeg  
1/4 C. sugar

If you haven't any applesauce on hand, open a jar. (Always keep a jar of apple sauce on your pantry shelf for emergencies.) Grease a shallow baking pan, pour apple sauce in pan and spread to all corners. Butter one side of bread slices, cut bread in quarters and place, butter-side-down, on apple sauce, melt butter and brush other side of quartered bread pieces with melted butter. Combine sugar, cinnamon and nutmeg and sprinkle over buttered bread. Bake in 350° oven for 20 minutes or until bread is toasted and crispy. Serve with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

Bon appetit.