

How to Clean Sheepshead

Learning how to clean sheepshead – a tasty local resident fish that is ignored (or at least not popularly targeted) by the men and women fishing our waters – is the first step in eating them. In some parts of the country – Louisiana, for example – they're not exactly considered trash fish, but they do not find their way to the fisher's table. Here in Florida, those of us that know the crab-like texture and taste of these challenging fighters have more than once recipe for its delicious meat.

Obviously you have to learn how to clean sheepshead before you eat them. If you already know how to filet a fish, then you're halfway there, and as we're going to show you, all you have to do is deal with what can best be described as a "Barrel" chest.

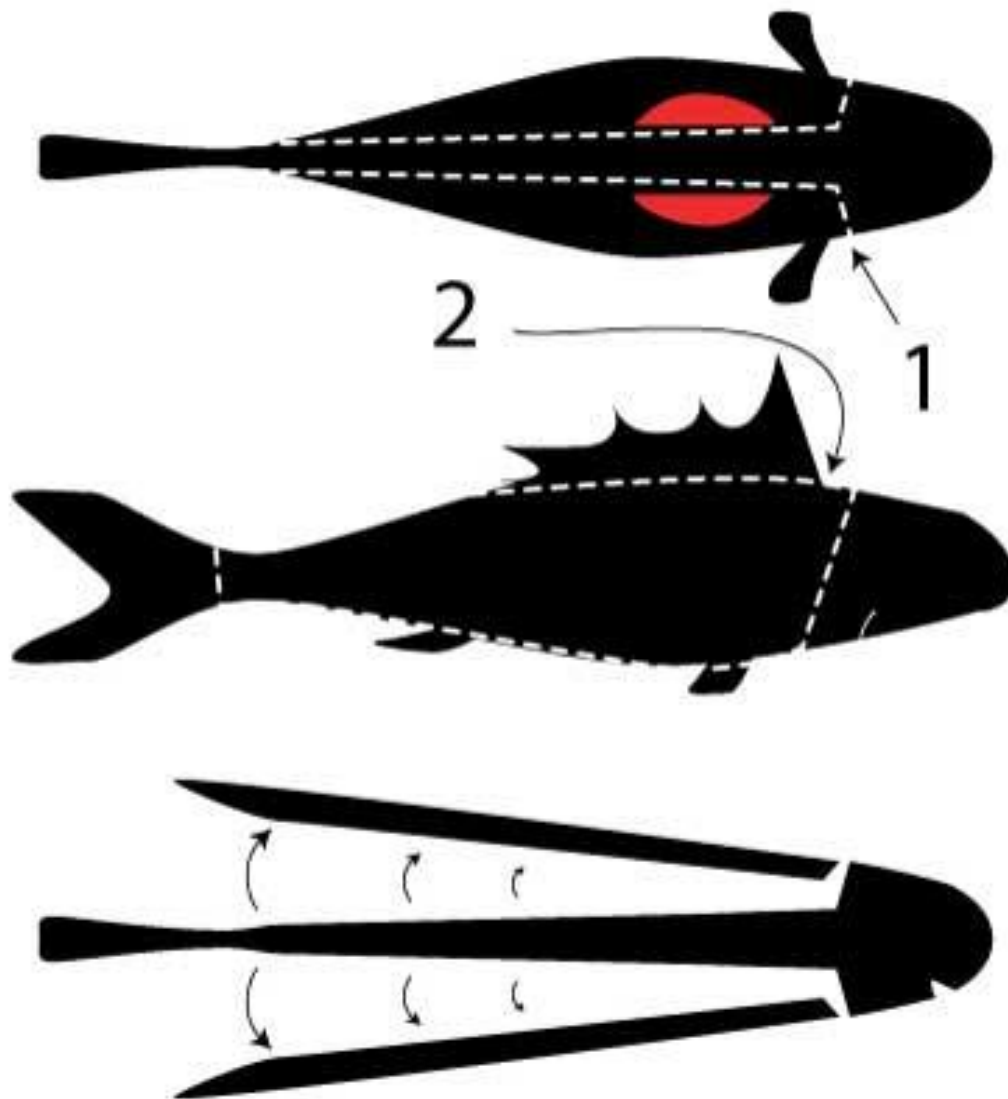
They're just a fish, right? We'll start with filleting a fish – any fish will do. One of the drawings we did will show you where the barrel will affect the path of the filet knife. To clean sheepshead, you have to deal with the fish's ribcage. We put a small Youtube playlist together (below) were you can see what we mean.

Filleting a Fish

To fillet a fish, you have to understand how they're made, and how the fillet – if and when you actually get it off the bones it grew on – is shaped, and what it should look like when it's done. This is critical in the learning process. Usually, people that are new to cleaning fish leave a great deal of the meat on the bones. This doesn't mean they can't clean a fish, it just means they don't really know what the end product should look like – and how the meat should be removed from the body.

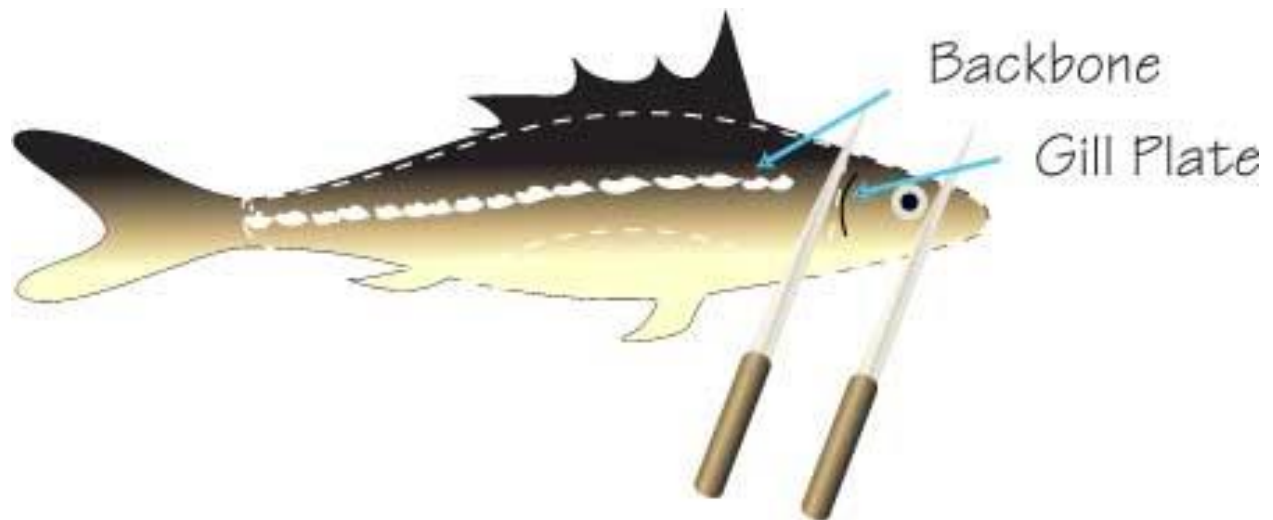
The basic concept behind cleaning a sheepshead is represented in this drawing. Other than the red shape next to the fins, the shape of the fillet is the same for a sheepshead as it is for a trout. The knife slips in next to the head, and slides down along the spinal column until it escapes the tail.

Cutting a Fillet



Sheepshead Filets are Fish Filets

This second image will better show you (because it has a knife) the side-view of the shape of the fillet. If you do it right, the bones on the spine should be almost transparent – you should be able to see light through them if you hold them to the sky:



To better help you understand the process of how to clean a sheephead, we've found a few outstanding videos on YouTube that show how three different people approach the process. Pay particular attention to the young guy from the Islands (his accent fails to indicate exactly what island, but it's definitely island-sounding). He pays attention to the great meat stored in the top of the fish's head –often ignored by even experienced cleaners.