

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

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Bib or pouting	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green							
Black sea bream or porgy	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green						
Brown trout	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red						
Clam, carpet or venus shell	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Clam, razor	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Cockle	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Cod, Atlantic	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green							
Coley or saithe	Red	Red	Red	Green								
Crab, brown or edible	Red	Red	Red	Green								
Crab, spider	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Dab	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Dover sole	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Dublin Bay Prawn/langoustine	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green							
Flounder	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green							
Grey gurnard	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Haddock	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green							
Hake, European	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green							
Herring or sild	Green											
Lemon sole	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Lobster	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Lythe or pollack	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green							
Mackerel	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Mussel	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Pilchard (adult) or sardine	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
Plaice	Red	Red	Red	Green								
Northern or cold-water prawn	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green							
Red gurnard	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Red mullet	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Scallop, King	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
Scallop, Queen	Green	Green	Red	Green								
Seabass or bass	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
Whelk	Green	Red	Red	Red								

Size matters



Fish Name	Sea area	Length / age at maturity	EU or other Minimum Landing Size (MLS)	Best choice, ask for...
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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...



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...



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 Commitee 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

Fish Name 

Sea area 

Length / age at maturity 

EU or other Minimum Landing Size (MLS) 

Best choice, Ask for... 

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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