

Opakapaka

hawaii pink snapper (*Pristipomoides filamentosus*)



Hawaii Pink Snapper is commonly known as ***opakapaka*** in Hawaii. Although this species occurs throughout the tropical Pacific, nowhere does it grow as large as in the Hawaiian Islands.

Seasonality & How They Are Caught

Availability and Seasonality:

Although *opakapaka* are caught year-round in the Hawaiian Islands, there is a distinct peak in landings during the winter season (October-February), particularly in the fishery around the main Hawaiian Islands. Most of the *opakapaka* caught off the main Hawaiian Islands are from 1 to 5 pounds in round weight, whereas the waters around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands yield fish mostly from 3 to 12 pounds in round weight or larger.

Distribution:

Opakapaka harvested from the main Hawaiian Islands, is sold at the Honolulu fish auction, through intermediary buyers on the major islands, and directly to retail fish markets and restaurants. The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands' catch is marketed primarily through the Honolulu fish auction.

Fishing Methods:

Opakapaka is caught principally by vertical hook-and-line gear. *Opakapaka* are usually caught at depths between 180 and 600 ft. The bottomfish fishery is basically divided into the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) and the main Hawaiian Islands. These fisheries are undergoing change. The establishment of the National Monument in the NWHI has set in motion the phasing out of the sustainable, NWHI

limited-entry bottomfish fishery.

The main Hawaiian Islands fishery remains under intensive management with an annual commercial catch limit. The restrictions on the NWHI fishery greatly reduce the supply of this important fish.

Quality

Opakapaka caught off the main Hawaiian Islands are marketed within a few days, whereas the fish taken in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in some cases may not reach the market for 10 days. When properly cared for, *opakapaka* has a long shelf life -- almost two weeks after capture.

Product Forms and Yields:

The ethnic and household retail market components in Hawaii have a strong preference for small (1 or 2 pound) *opakapaka*. The larger-sized fish are filleted (usually leaving the skin on to allow buyers to identify it as true *opakapaka*) for the restaurant market. The yield of fillet from a whole fish averages about 45%.

Opakapaka is marketed in whole and filleted form to supply a growing demand in U.S. mainland restaurants.

The quality of *opakapaka* can be maintained better by shipping it whole, but this advantage is offset by higher per unit air freight costs.

Color, Taste, Texture:

Opakapaka has a clear, light pink flesh that is firm in texture. Its delicate flavor has gained the *opakapaka* a reputation as Hawaii's premium snapper. Fish caught during the winter months tend to have a higher fat content than those caught in the summer, and *opakapaka* yields the best *sashimi* during the winter season.

Preparations

The smaller-sized fish harvested off the main Hawaiian Islands are directed toward the ethnic restaurant and household retail markets in Hawaii, where *opakapaka* is often

prepared by steaming or baking fish with the head on. In these markets, *opakapaka* is also used to make *sashimi* and fish head soup.

Opakapaka fillets are well suited for an array of preparations, including baking, poaching and sautéing.

Historical Note

The popularity of *opakapaka* as a “catch of the day” is not entirely a recent development. *Opakapaka* was one of the most common fish served in Hawaii's restaurants prior to World War II. *Opakapaka* has been the most important bottomfish species in terms of total landed weight and value in Hawaii for decades.



Hawaii Seafood Council

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