

“...but is
it edible?”

Jim Stephen



Several species of Kansas fish get little attention from sport anglers and even less from chefs. These fish frequent a wide variety of habitats. In some cases, they've successfully thwarted intense removal or eradication projects. Many reach trophy size — and are edible to boot. A few are even delicious! All are classified as non-game fish. Let's take a brief look at some of these tarpaper denizens of our state waters.

Carp

This largest member of the minnow family is an exotic species brought from Europe to the United States in the 1880s. Praised for its eating qualities in the old country, the carp's importation was encouraged here by immigrants. It is recognized as an intelligent and hardy fish by biologists and is a strong, aggressive fighter when taken by pole and line.

Carp are found throughout Kansas, in both running and still waters. They are omnivorous; just about anything is food for a carp! Their habit of uprooting the bottom vegetation while searching for food, thus creating turbid water and competing with other fish species, does not endear them to sport anglers.

Buffalo

Three species of buffalo fish exist in Kansas: the bigmouth, smallmouth, and black. Not readily taken on hook and line, these fish feed primarily on zooplankton, straining the water through devices in their gill structures called gill rakers. Buffalo fish reach weights in excess of 50 pounds and are a valuable commercial species with excellent eating qualities. Over 600,000 pounds of buffalo fish have been taken from Kansas waters annually since 1978.

Drum

Related to the saltwater drum, freshwater drum are found throughout Kansas in major streams and impoundments. They're excellent fighters on rod and reel and good food fish. Slow growing but prolific, drum often compete with sportfish for food—though they also become prey for predacious species. Many of these fish are taken by anglers fishing for walleye and channel catfish. Drum prefer minnows and nightcrawlers and will take a variety of artificial lures such as plugs, spoons, and jigs. Drum can reach 50 pounds in weight; the Kansas state record is 31 pounds 4 ounces.

Gar

The gar is a primitive fish, a throw-back to prehistoric species. Gar prefer

slow-moving streams and quiet backwaters and are very tolerant of low oxygen levels. Gar can be taken on gobs of worms or minnows. The gar's bony mouth makes hooking difficult and various methods to entangle the fish's sharp teeth have been employed, including the use of raveled nylon cord in conjunction with the bait. Though gar flesh is a delicacy, the eggs of this fish are poisonous. Three gar species are found in Kansas: the longnose, snortnose, and spotted. The longnose gar is the most abundant.

Many other non-game fish species occur in Kansas waters, but these four rank high in size, abundance and palatability. Most are taken incidentally, while anglers are pursuing sportfish. Since many of them can tolerate extreme water temperatures as well as high turbidities, non-game fish are available to anglers for a longer season and in more areas than species with more stringent requirements and tolerances.

Just because they're classified as non-game doesn't make these fish any less sporty. Angling for carp, for example, requires the same skill and patience required for many game species. Dangling bait on the bottom is the surest way to attract a carp's attention. Good bait includes corn, cheese, earthworms, and raw potatoes. Most popular, and most controversial, is the ubiquitous doughball. The doughball is simple enough in concept, but literally hundreds of recipes exist for concocting this fare. Here are two of the most popular.

doughballs . . . cooked

½ cup canned corn juice
¼ cup crushed corn
cornmeal as needed to form thick dough
flour as needed to obtain desired consistency

Bring corn juice to boil; stir in crushed corn while boiling. Add cornmeal until mass is solid but still moist. Remove from heat and add flour to form soft but firm mass.

doughballs . . . uncooked

1 pint powdered cornflakes
¼ cup brown sugar

Mix ingredients well and store in a screw-top jar. On site mix with water enough to knead the dry mixture into a stiff dough that forms well around the hook.

A special doughball recipe for buffalo fish is:

2 oz. sour grape candy, melted
1 cup white flour
1 small box Wheaties cereal

When candy is melted, mix in flour and cereal. Knead into balls.

When fishing with doughballs, use small hooks (number six and eight treble hooks are great) and only enough weight to permit casting. Allow some slack line. Since carp will carry bait away before eating, a tight line will encourage the fish to drop the bait. Use a bobber only if you make sure the bait reaches the bottom. Keep the bobber size small. Your line should be eight- to ten-pound monofilament because of the size and strength of the fish you're after.

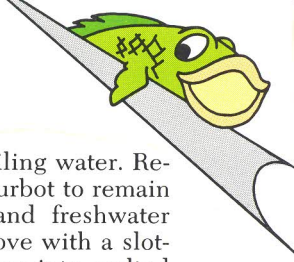
Though hook and line anglers account for most of the non-game fish taken in Kansas waters, other methods can be used. All Kansas waters are open to bowfishing unless posted otherwise. Species that can be taken when bowfishing include: carp, buffalo, carp-sucker, sucker, gar, gizzard shad, drum, white amur, goldfish, eel, sturgeon, goldeye, and bowfin. Bowfishermen must have in their possession a valid Kansas fishing license. Fish arrows must have a barbed head and each must be attached by line to the bow and must be shot from the bow.

Spearfishing is limited to legal scuba and skin divers. No spearing (gigging) from above the water surface is allowed in Kansas.

Fish — non-game or sportfish — are too often pitched on the bank to roll in the dirt, left dead in a livewell of warm water, or held all day on a stringer. The surest way to have a delicious product is to maintain a fresh-caught condition in your fish as long as possible. Freshly caught fish — preferably gutted — should be iced in a cooler chest. If no ice chest is available, try to keep your catch alive as long as you can.

Carp, drum, and buffalo fish should be skinned, as the skin may impart a strong fishy flavor when left on the meat. This can be done initially, or you can skin after the meat is off the bones.

To skin a whole fish, first gut it. Then grasp it by its head and cut through the scales and skin along the entire length of its back. Cut on each side of the dorsal fin. Cut through the skin down each side just in back of the head. Using pliers,



start at the upper corners and peel off the skin down to the belly. Remove any fins yet attached. Remove the dark longitudinal band of red meat; it may impart a strong flavor. Then remove the head.

To fillet the fish, make a deep incision from top to bottom immediately behind the gill cover. Then insert your blade just in back of the head and cut to the backbone on either side of the top fin. Next, push the point of your knife down from the back to the vent and pull the blade through to the tail. Lift the flap of meat near the head and, with a downward slicing motion, separate the meat from the vertebral column and rib cage. Repeat for the other side of the fish.

To remove skin and scales, place a fillet skin side down. Firmly grip the tail end of the fillet and cut into the fleshy portion until you reach the layer of skin. With a gentle sawing motion away from you, separate skin from flesh. Carp and buffalo have many small "Y" bones throughout the flesh. Each fillet should be scored by cutting into the fillet and through the "Y" bones at quarter-inch intervals in the front two thirds of the fish. Cooking oils are then able to soften the bones to make them unnoticeable.

Gar have a layer of durable scales protecting their flesh. To get to the flesh, cleave the dorsal area lengthwise past the protective skin and scales. Then with a sharp knife separate skin from flesh around the cylindrical body. Once the skin is removed, the fish can be steaked to size by slicing crossways.

A surprising number of people have non-game fish recipes. Most are willing to share them. The recipes included here came from a variety of sources. *A Fine Kettle of Fish*, by Vern Hacker of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, was especially helpful. Our thanks to the many contributors.

Fish Paprikash

1-6 lb. whole fish
salt
3 tbsp. cooking oil
1 small onion, finely chopped
1 tsp. paprika
½ c. sour cream, room temperature

Clean and fillet the fish and make a stock with the heads, tails, and bones. Wash and dry the fillets, salt lightly, and place in a lightly oiled baking dish. Sauté chopped onions in oil. Stir in pa-

prika and 1 c. fish stock. Simmer 10 minutes, then take the pan off heat and let it cool to lukewarm. Blend some of the paprika sauce into the sour cream, then slowly pour it back into the sauce. Taste for seasoning and consistency; if necessary, dilute the sauce with more fish stock or water. Pour sour cream sauce over fillets, cover and bake 20 minutes in 300°F oven. Serve with galuska (spaetzle).

Planked Carp

3 or 4 pounds dressed carp, fresh or frozen
1½ tsp. salt
Dash of pepper
2 tbsp. melted fat or oil
Seasoned hot mashed potatoes
Seasoned hot cooked vegetables (broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, onions or tomatoes)

Clean, wash and dry fish. Sprinkle inside and out with salt and pepper. Place fish on a well-greased platter, 16 x 10 inches. Brush with fat. Bake in a moderate oven, 350°F, for 40 to 60 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Remove from oven and arrange border of hot mashed potatoes around fish. Broil about eight inches from source of heat for six to eight minutes or until potatoes are lightly browned. Remove from broiler and arrange two or more hot vegetables around fish. Serves 6.

Baked Buffalo with Mustard Sauce

1½ pounds of fish
2 tbsp. fat
1 tbsp. flour
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. prepared mustard
½ c. fine, dry bread crumbs
1 c. boiling water

Cut fish into serving-size pieces and lay in a shallow, greased pan. Melt half the fat and blend in the flour. Add the water and lemon juice. Cook until thickened. Stir in the mustard gradually, then pour sauce over the fish. Add the remaining fat to the crumbs and sprinkle over the fish. Bake at 400°F for 20 to 25 minutes. Serves 4.

Poor Man's Lobster

2 qts. water
2 tbsp. salt
Fish fillets

Drop fillets in salted boiling water. Return to full boil; allow burbot to remain in water 1½ minutes and freshwater drum 3-4 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon. Dip fish pieces into melted butter or pour butter over fish. Sprinkle with salt and lemon juice. Serve with boiled new potatoes, vegetable, pickles, cole slaw and rye bread.

One variation to this is to prepare a "crab boil." Cut the fillets in finger-sized pieces, then drop them in the boil. Serve the pieces with melted butter or simple cocktail sauce.

Canned Carp

Fillet and cut fish in 2-inch pieces. Pack pieces in clear pint jars. Add: 1 tsp. salt, 3 tsp. vinegar, and 1 drop Liquid Smoke per pint. Pressure cook process for 80 minutes at 10 lbs. pressure.

Canned Drum

Pack fillets in pint jars solidly. Add ½ tsp. salt and 1 tbsp. cooking oil. Screw on lids. Cook in pressure cooker 90 minutes at 10 lbs. pressure (or 65 minutes at 15 lbs. pressure).

Smoked Carp Chowder

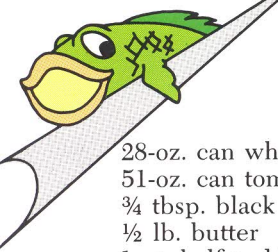
In all soups and chowders, the bones of the fish should be removed before use. Give special attention to those fish with Y-bones.

1 lb. smoked carp
1 can (10¼ oz.) frozen condensed cream of potato soup
3 c. milk
1 tbsp. grated onion
1 small bay leaf
Dash of pepper
1 can (8 oz.) whole kernel corn
Chopped parsley

Remove skin and bones from carp. Flake the fish. Combine soup, milk, onion, bay leaf and pepper. Heat until soup is thawed, stirring occasionally. Add corn and fish; heat. Remove bay leaf. Garnish with parsley. Serves 6.

Fish Chowder

Recipe makes 3 gallons — use 12 qt. kettle
5 lbs. white potatoes
1 onion (3" diameter)
1¾ tbsp. salt
4 lbs. boned fish



28-oz. can whole tomatoes
 51-oz. can tomato soup
 ¼ tsp. black pepper
 ½ lb. butter
 1 pt. half-and-half coffee cream
 ¼ lb. soda crackers (reduce to meal in blender; add hot water to make slurry)

Peel, quarter, and slice potatoes thin. Rinse in cold water until water is clear of excess starch. Put onion in blender with a little water and reduce to liquid. Add onion and salt to potatoes, cover with water, then add 2 extra qts. of water. Boil until potatoes are soft. Do not pour off liquid. With potato masher, reduce about ¾ of the potatoes to a puree. Cut the fish in chunks if you're using raw fish. Add to the potato puree. Put whole tomatoes in blender for 2 seconds to break up; add to potato puree along with the tomato soup. Cook until the fish flakes. Turn down heat. Add pepper, butter, half-and-half, and soda crackers. Add hot water to give consistency of a medium-thick soup. Simmer for ½ hour.

Fried Buffalo

Lightly salt fillets (or strips of buffalo ribs). In a bowl mix the following:

1 c. unsifted flour
 1 tsp. baking powder
 1 tsp. salt

Add ¾ c. milk and 1 egg, well beaten. Beat until smooth. Dip fish in batter and carefully drop in hot (375°F) fat. Fry for approximately 3 minutes and drain.

Pickled Carp

Wash fillets well and place for 60 min. in brine (1 c. salt/1 gal. water). Drain and add new brine (2 c. Morton's Tender-Quick/1 gal. of water). Drain and rinse.

In a large pot mix 6 c. vinegar, 3 c. water, and 4 medium sliced onions.

Add:

1 tbsp. allspice
 1 tbsp. crushed bay leaves
 1 tbsp. whole cloves
 1 tbsp. brown sugar
 ½ tsp. garlic salt
 1 tsp. lemon pepper
 1 box (1½ oz.) whole pickling spice

Bring to boil and simmer for 15 min. Add 10 lbs. of fillets. Cook until fish is easily pierced with fork. Pack fish loosely in pint jars and pour on the vinegar pickling. Add a piece of alum the

size of a small pea to each pint of fish. Keep refrigerated.

Pickled Buffalo

Soak fillets in a strong pickling or uniodized salt brine (3 c. salt/1 qt. water) for 24 hours while refrigerated. Drain off brine and rinse fillets. Cover fillets with white vinegar and refrigerate again for 24 hours.

Mix a marinade of 1 c. white vinegar, ½ c. water, ½ c. sugar, ½ c. port white wine, ½ tsp. pickling spices. Bring to boil, then cool to room temperature.

Drain fish of vinegar. Cut fillets into ¾" chunks and pack in glass jars, alternating layers of fish with layers of onion rings. Strain spices from cooled marinade and pour over fish and onions. Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours.



Wayne van Zwoil photo

You bet it's edible! In fact, it's good! Carp, gar, drum, buffalo — all are underrated as food fish. Use a little imagination, a dash of lemon, and one of these recipes; you'll be convinced!

Smoked Fish

Brine recipes are legion, but 1 c. salt in 1 gal. water (or a solution strong enough to float an egg) with ½ c. brown sugar seems standard. Spices can be added, but are not necessary. Clean and wash fish, then marinate in a cold brine from two hours to overnight, depending on the size of the fish. Remember that the longer the fish remains in the brine the saltier the fish will taste. Remove the fish after the necessary marinating time, rinse and damp dry with paper towels. Allow to air dry uncovered in a refrigerator overnight so a "skin" forms on the flesh side. Remove and place skin (scale) side down on smoker racks, with larger fish nearer the smoke and heat source.

Chunks of split maple, hickory, or apple wood 4 inches in diameter should be presoaked in water. Place the wood chunks on the fire source and keep temperatures less than 200°F. A meat thermometer is handy in this case. Smoking should take 4-6 hours. Examine the fish occasionally to see if your desired moisture level has been reached. Don't let them dry out completely. Smoked fish should keep for several weeks.

Fish Cakes

Cook fillets and flake meat from the bones, or use canned fish. For each ½ pound of fish add:

¼ lb. mashed potatoes
 1 tbsp. chopped onion
 1 tsp. finely chopped parsley
 1 whole egg
 ½ oz. Crisco
 Salt and pepper to taste

Mix thoroughly and form patties. Fry in vegetable oil until golden brown.

Fish Loaf

3 c. ground fish fillets
 1 c. tomato juice
 ½ c. cracker crumbs
 ¼ tsp. dry mustard
 1 whole egg
 1 tbsp. fat
 ½ small onion
 ½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce
 ½ c. water.

Grind fish and combine with the tomato juice, water, crumbs and egg. Melt fat and fry the onion in it for two minutes. Add the fish mixture, mustard, and Worcestershire sauce. Pack in greased loaf pan and bake at 350°F for 1 to 1½ hours. Serve with horseradish sauce.

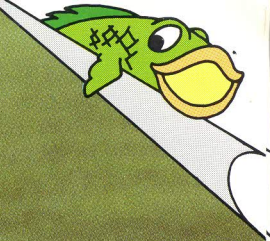
Sauces

Sauces are frequently served with fish when additional spicy taste is desired. Here are a couple proven recipes:

2 tbsp. fat
 2 tbsp. flour
 1 c. milk
 Horseradish

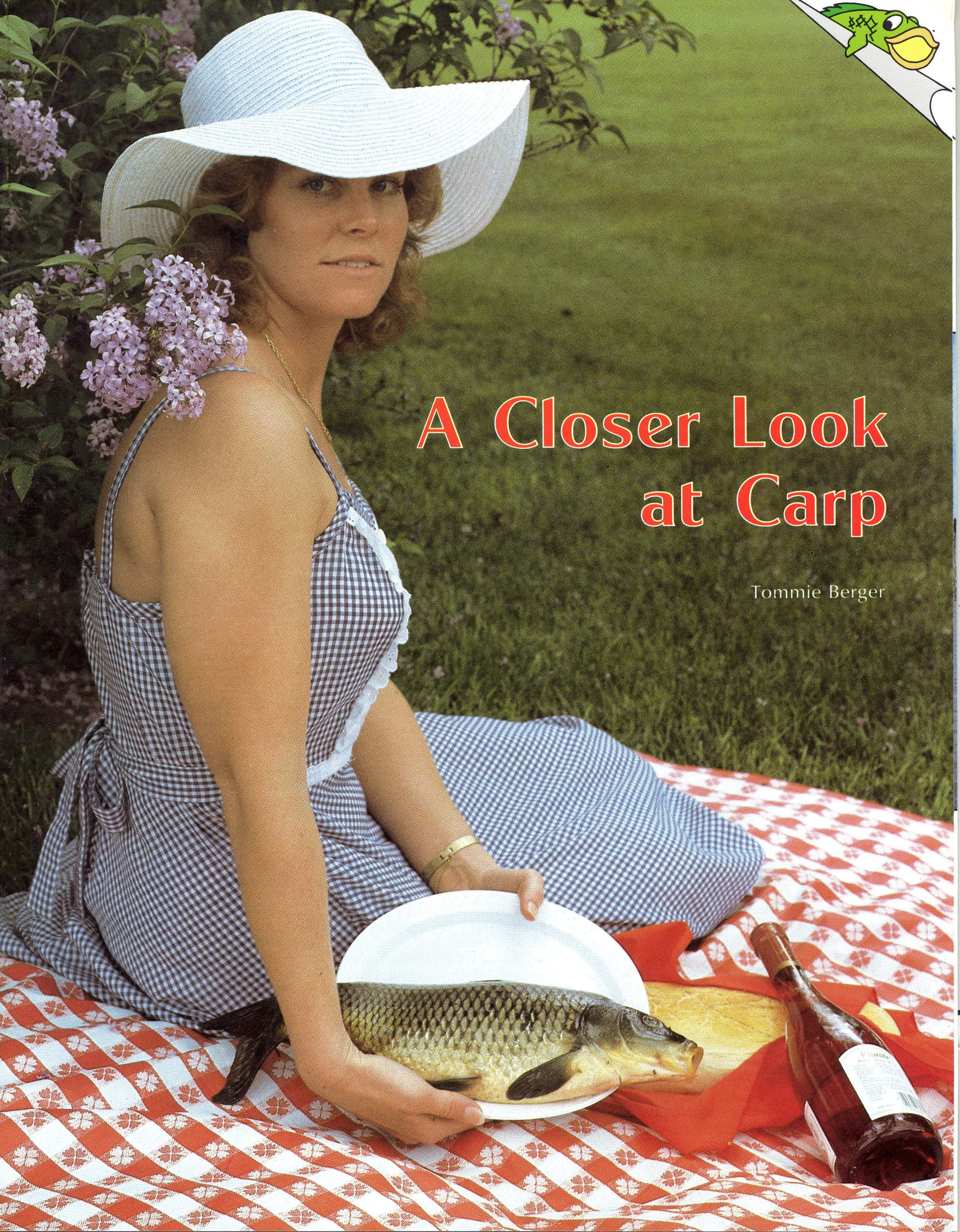
Melt fat and blend in flour. Add milk gradually, stirring to prevent lumps. Cook until thickened. Add horseradish to taste. Or try:

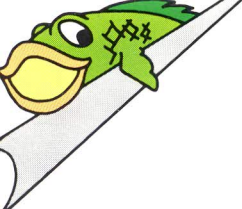
¾ c. catsup
 ⅛ to ¼ c. prepared horseradish
 juice of one lemon
 dash hot pepper sauce



A Closer Look at Carp

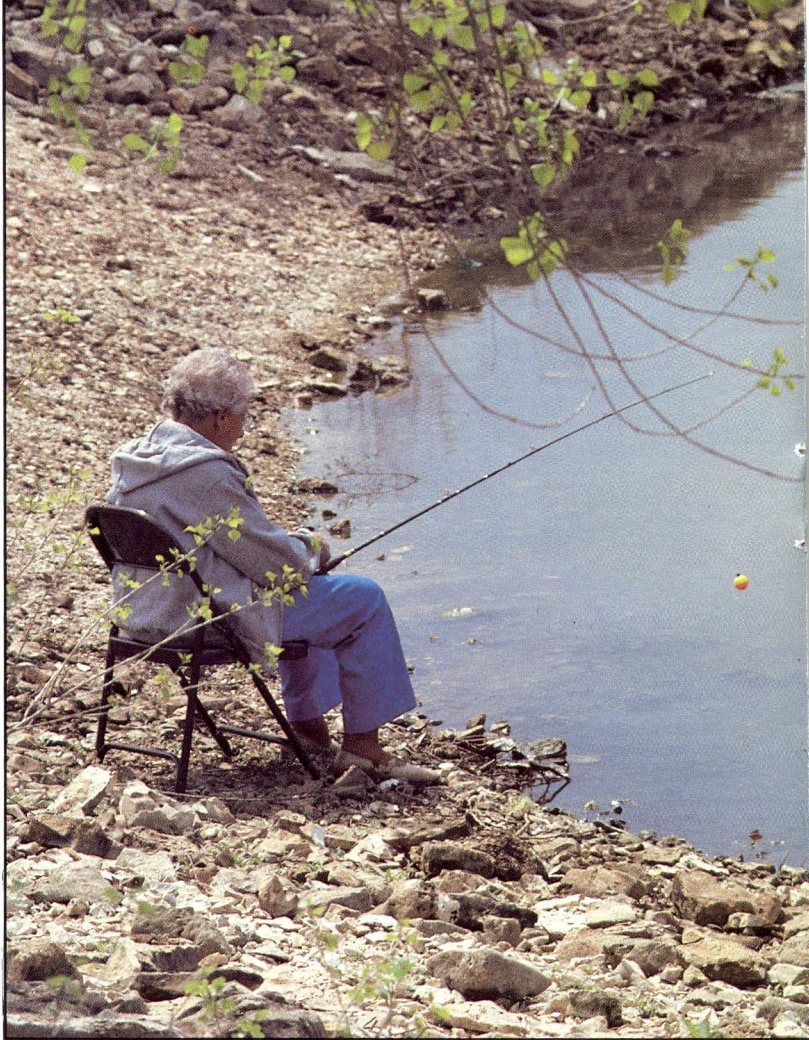
Tommie Berger





Carp. Yuk. Americans grow up spurning carp. It doesn't look like they want a fish to look or taste like they want a fish to taste. Neither of which is the carp's fault.

Nor do other cultures share our contempt. Emperors keep pet carp in jeweled tanks in some Asian countries, while in Japan carp — especially big carp — have a high barter value. In Europe the carp is highly acclaimed by both commercial and sport fishermen. In England it ranks second only to trout as a game fish and is the object of restocking programs.



Ron Spomer photo

Carp fishing is a relaxing sport. No matter what your age or angling experience, carp are fun to catch. No exotic lures required, no \$10,000 boat, no depthfinder. Carp make fishing what fishing should be: simple.

History

Oddly enough, Kansans at one time also hailed the carp as a fine game and food fish. When carp were first introduced into this country in the late 1800s, they were selling readily at \$1 per pound! It's interesting, too, that our tremendous carp fishery all began with just five carp, the survivors of 83 shipped by steamer from Germany in August, 1872. Offspring from the original five numbered over 3,000 by the summer of 1873.

Nationwide distribution came in 1877 when the Bureau of Fisheries began to stock carp in large numbers. It was at a peak around 1883 when 260,000 were distributed to 298 of the 302 Congressional Districts. The reason, wrote Spencer F. Baird, then U.S. Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries, was that "Their instinct for domestication has already been established and there is no reason why time should be lost with less proven species."

Though the carp came to the United States as a hero, people soon began to regard this prolific fish in a different

light. As early as 1883, an increase in carp numbers was accompanied by a great decrease in wild celery and wild rice in shallow northern lakes. The carp was subsequently blamed for ruining some of the nation's finest waterfowl lakes and marshes. People began to notice that where there was a comparatively large number of carp in a pond, the water was always turbid.

"Carp up to 86 pounds have been reported . . ."

Carp became the dominant fish in many lakes and rivers. Lakes fertilized with domestic sewage had high densities of carp, another black eye for this poor fellow. One observer said of carp around the turn of the century, "German carp are nomadic in their habits and wander apparently aimlessly into all ac-

cessible waters, hence if introduced into any streams, will spread rapidly over the whole system ... Like undesirable weeds, they have spread everywhere and it is practically impossible to limit their progress or to effect their extirpation."

Despite a dubious history and bovine personality, carp *do* have redeeming qualities. Many shallow lakes would be totally weed-choked if it were not for the common carp and his cousin, the grass carp. Carp also have some commercial value, estimated at between two and three million dollars per year. They aren't bad eating when taken from clean water and prepared properly. And once you've hooked a carp, you'll enjoy the fight of your life. What other fish can you name that is so readily available, so eager to bite on just about anything and so game at the end of a line? Whether we like it or not, carp can be found from one corner of Kansas to the other and are here to stay. So let's take advantage of that fact and start to view the carp as a fish to be celebrated!

Biology

The common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) is the largest member of the minnow family. He is a robust fish, deep through the body and laterally compressed with large, thick scales. His toothless mouth and thick lips are cornered by a pair of barbels which he uses to sense food along the bottom.

Carp have a single dorsal fin with a strong serrated spine at the front. Colors range from dull silver to a bronze green on the back. The sides are lighter, grading to white or yellow on the belly.

These fish spawn in very shallow water in May or early June, dispersing their eggs at random over vegetation or inundated brush and debris. They thrash the water vigorously while spawning. A large female can produce between one-half and three million tiny grayish-white eggs.

Rate of growth depends upon water fertility and food availability. A Kansas carp should weigh a pound after two growing seasons and will generally grow rapidly from that point on. The present state record is 37.31 pounds. Carp up to 86 pounds have been reported in other states, and carp near 100 pounds are common in Europe and Asia.

The carp is a bottom feeder and omnivorous, eating nearly anything that can be ingested. Aquatic invertebrates such as insect larvae, crustaceans, plankton and small mollusks make up a large part of his diet. Carp do a lot of grubbing around along the bottom, often uprooting aquatic plants but seldom eating them.

The carp is an extremely hardy fish that can live in waters uninhabitable by other fish species. Carp can survive long periods with little oxygen and can live in polluted waters by sucking the oxygen-rich surface film which is in direct contact with the air. Some call him the "sewer bass" because of these survival traits. A carp can survive long periods out of water if kept moist and can withstand extreme changes in water temperature.

Fishing Methods

Carp enjoy warm water and can be caught most readily when the water temperature is above 50 degrees F. Late spring, summer and early fall are the most productive seasons to catch a carp on a rod and reel in the sunflower state. When I was a boy Dad and I didn't get too excited about carp fishing until the good spring channel cat and crappie fishing was over. But as the summer heated up we'd get out the old dough bait recipes and head for Stranger Creek in Leavenworth County or the low-water dam on the Kansas River at Law-

rence. I can remember some trips when we'd drive 100 miles out to the Big Blue River near Marysville or 60 miles over to the Delaware River below Perry Reservoir — just to spend a day fishing for carp!

Carp are shallow-water fish and unless the water is extremely clear, you shouldn't need to fish any deeper than 8 to 10 feet. Since they are bottom feeders, a bait set under a bobber usually is not very successful. Carp have a fairly small mouth. Some anglers prefer single hooks, while others opt for a treble. The type of bait will determine the type of

nel corn and dough baits. Worms are also a proven winner if you can keep the sunfish and small channel catfish from stealing them. Plain bread works well when mashed into a ball, and some anglers even use partly boiled potatoes. I've had good luck in the late summer and fall with grasshoppers. Marshmallows work too.

My favorite carp dough ball recipe uses whole wheat flour, garlic salt, cinnamon and vanilla. You would do well to give it a try. First, mix the flour with warm water to form a dough. Add flour



Bow and arrow buffs take note! The carp is one fish that is not only a legal but a sporting quarry. During spawning runs in shallow water shooting can be very fast — and those big-lipped targets aren't as easy to hit as you might think!

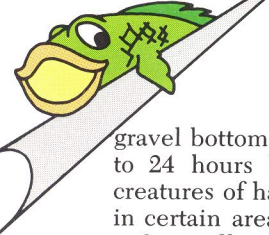
hook you use. Dough baits work well with treble hooks. Hook sizes 6, 8, 10 and 12 are best. Sinkers should only be used to provide the needed casting weight and to keep the bait on the bottom. Egg or slip sinkers should be employed so that the fish feels no resistance when he mouths the bait.

Line size is important. Carp are formidable fighters and spend lots of time close to underwater brush. Line weights of 8- to 14-pound test are best in most carp-fishing situations.

The two most commonly used carp baits in our state are canned whole ker-

for firmness, water for softness. Then stir in the other ingredients until it smells almost good enough to eat. Anise oil gives dough balls a good flavor. One of my uncle's favorite recipes was a dough made out of Wheaties and strawberry soda pop. Like I said, Kansas carp will eat just about anything!

Chumming or baiting a hole is a common carp-fishing practice. (No, it is not illegal to bait a hole for any Kansas fish.) Scattering soaked corn, oats, chopped cooked vegetables or dough balls in likely spots to be fished can attract carp to a given area. Try to find a sand or



gravel bottom and use this technique 6 to 24 hours before fishing. Carp are creatures of habit, and repeated baiting in certain areas can be quite effective.

Generally speaking, carp fishing is very much a “sit-down-and-wait-for-a-bite” affair. Some anglers might have trouble with that, but a lot can be said for a leisurely day on the creek bank, relaxing and waiting for a big carp to come along. Carp fishing can be suspenseful, thrilling and relaxing, all in one. Can you think of a better way to spend hot summer days, when nothing else will bite?

“The nice thing about carp is you don’t need a boat; the best fishing is close to shore.”

You can catch carp with just about any piece of fishing equipment made. Cane or bamboo poles will work for smaller carp, but lacking the ability to let a fish run for 20 or 30 feet severely limits their effectiveness when large carp are available. Closed-face spincast reels are fine if they have a good drag system. Most carp fishermen prefer a medium-size, open-face spinning reel and a fairly stout six- to eight-foot rod.

Rod rests or rod holders are essential when carp fishing. In lakes or slow-moving streams, many anglers fish with a very loose line and an open bail. In currents tight lining is required. If you don’t have access to a rod rest or a rod holder, you’d better find a rock or a log to lay your rod against. By last count, big carp have made off with three of my fishing outfits — hook, line, sinker, rod, reel, the works! Although most carp bite lightly, some just pick up the bait and head for the other side of the river. A landing net is important, since carp are hard fighters and difficult to handle by hand. Big and deep is the word for a carp net.

There aren’t too many places in Kansas waters you won’t find carp. Like all fish, though, they prefer certain types of water. Upper ends of lakes where the water is warm and shallow are generally better than deeper areas. Backs of coves, close to vegetation or brushpiles, are also good spots to try. Stream anglers

should spend their time fishing deep holes on creek bends. Don’t cast to the deepest part of the hole; instead aim for the far bank and let your bait settle within three to six feet of the shore. Cast close to brush or logs extending out of the water. Carp like to congregate where fresh water runs in, so check out areas just below a feeder stream junction, next to a spring and below any obstruction in the stream, such as a waterfall or a low-water dam. I’ve had some of my best fishing days near the outlets of reservoirs and below low-water dams.

Large reservoirs hold lots of carp. Fishing the shallow upper ends of coves and areas where feeder streams dump in will usually provide action. The nice thing about carp is you don’t need a boat; the best fishing is close to shore.

Bow and arrow enthusiasts find rough fish like carp an exciting challenge, especially in the spring and early summer when carp are spawning in the shallows. Some archery clubs have organized carp shoots in and around waterfowl marshes throughout the summer when water levels are low and carp are abundant.

Regulations regarding bowfishing have changed in the last few years and many archers are still not aware of the

relaxed requirements. In Kansas, bowfishing is legal *in all waters* unless posted otherwise. The only other restriction is that water within 50 yards of an occupied boat dock, swimming area or picnic site is closed to bowfishing. (Carp fishing with a bow *does* require you to have a Kansas license, by the way.) The May-June spawning season is the best time for bowfishing carp. Be sure to stalk quietly, as carp in the shallows are very spooky.

To Cook a Carp ...

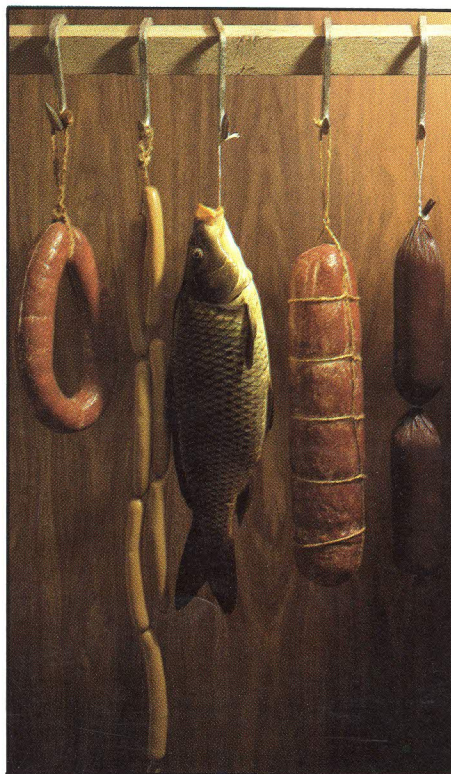
Unfortunately, the average American angler is not a carp eater. I’m not sure if that’s because they’ve tried them and found them unpalatable or if it’s because they’ve heard so many stories about carp they just assume they’re not good. I really think lots of anglers would change their minds if they forgot all those stories and gave carp a try.

The flesh of carp is somewhat darker than that of the walleye, crappie and catfish. And yes, carp do have inter-muscular bones throughout the meat that can be bothersome. Still, there are several ways to make this fish just as edible as any other.

Carp can be fried, pressure cooked, baked, pickled or smoked. My favorite recipes are deep fat fried carp and fried carp patties. Most folks clean fish by either filleting them or removing the head, entrails, fins and scales and leaving the backbone and ribs intact. Whichever method you prefer, you also need to “score” a carp to rid him of the small bones. Scoring is merely a process of slicing two thirds of the way through the slabs of meat every one-eighth to one-fourth inch parallel to the ribs, all the way from one end to the other. After scoring, dip the carp in your favorite fish batter and fry to a golden brown.

For carp patties, simply fillet several carp and run the meat through a coarse meat grinder or food processor. Take the ground flesh and add corn flake crumbs, eggs, garlic salt and minced onions until the mixture forms patties that no longer stick to your fingers. Drop these patties in a deep fat fryer or skillet. Several fishing friends prefer these patties over conventional walleye or crappie fillets.

The carp is, indeed, an underrated fish in Kansas. He needn’t be. Great carp fishing is available in most any water near your home if you want to give it a try. Expensive trips aren’t necessary, equipment needs are minimal, and bait is as close as your backyard garden and corner grocery. You won’t find many fish that try any harder to pull that rod from your hands, and if you’ll take a bit more time to prepare carp right, you can add many delicious and nutritious meals to the family menu. □



Gene Brehm photo

Butcher’s choice? Maybe not; but the carp was originally introduced to Kansas waters as a food fish and is still considered a delicacy in many countries.