

Slippery Customers

The squid is not more difficult to clean than other seafood and its versatility means there are myriad ways to enjoy them.

About 500 species of squid exist worldwide,

ranging in size from 2.5 centimetres to the largest invertebrate on Earth, the infamous giant squid, measuring up to 18 metres long and weighing 900 kilograms (a 15-metre long specimen was found washed up on Seven Mile Beach in eastern Tasmania in 2002 weighing 250 kilograms).

Technically, squids are molluscs, although, unlike other molluscs, the subgroup to which they belong, cephalopods (including octopus and cuttlefish), don't have external shells (one rarely seen sub-species of cephalopod, the pearly nautilus, does have an external shell) and have an ink sac, from which they squirt a thick black ink to help distract predators. Most of them can also rapidly change colour, another handy survival technique. They have a long, cylindrical body (also called a mantle, hood or tube) with eight shorter arms and two longer tentacles and a thin, translucent, feather-shaped internal shell (called a quill or gladius fin), which is made from chitin, a plastic-like material from which prawn shells and human finger nails are also made of. They are found in oceans all over the world, from intertidal waters to great depths, but not in fresh water, and have a relatively short life span, making them a very sustainable species for commercial fishing.

Here are some of the major squid species found in the region:

Big Fin Reef Squid or **Northern Calamari** (sepioteuthis lessoniana) have thick, dark brown-green bodies marked by transverse bars and long side fins running almost their full length. Their bodies can reach a length of 36 centimetres and they can weigh up to 1.5 kilograms. Their distribution is wide, from Africa to Hawaii and Japan to northern Australia.

Southern calamari (sepioteuthis australis), a related species found in southern Australia, have thin mottled purple-brown skin and long, rounded side fins running almost the full length of their bodies. They are typically about 16 centimetres long.

Swordtip Squid (photololigo edulis) have long thin bodies and pointy side fins that run about half the length of their bodies. They grow to about 30 centimetres (even 40 centimetres in some areas) and change colour from almost translucent to red, depending on their surroundings and situation. They are widely distributed in the western Pacific Ocean, from northern Australia to Japan. **Mitre Squid** (Photololigo formosana) or (Photololigo chinensis), a closely related species, have a mottled pink-purple skin and are usually smaller. Chinensis and edulis together account for about half the cephalopods landed in Hong Kong. **Indian Squid** (Photololigo duavaucellii) are smaller still and found close to shore in shallow waters.

Purpleback Flying Squid (Sthenoteuthis oualaniensis) is one of a number of ommastrephids, or 'flying squid', which are able to propel themselves out of the water and glide through the air for brief periods of time. They have long thin bodies with relatively short but wide fins at the top and relatively short tentacles and are found throughout the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

BUYING

When purchasing fresh whole squid, look for intact bright skin, with a light brown to purple mottled appearance and intact head and tentacles. Cleaned tubes should be white without any brown markings, although it's always preferable to buy whole squid as it's difficult to judge the age of cleaned tubes and whether or not they've been frozen.

PREPARING

To clean whole squid: grasp the tentacles and pull firmly to separate head from tube (try not to break the ink sac, as the ink stains), cut below the eyes and discard head and guts, push beak (mouth) out from between the arms. Remove quill, peel skin off by grasping side fins and peeling around the tube. Side fins can be peeled and used; tentacles can also be washed and used. If cutting tube into rings, wash inside well to remove any remaining gut, otherwise cut tube open along the obvious seam, lay out flat and wipe the inside clean with a clean cloth. It can then be sliced into strips, or the inside scored in a hatch pattern (called 'honeycombing') and sliced into larger chunks. It is also possible to cook squid without peeling it, the skin will turn a dark purple as it cooks. The average yield is 80%.

COOKING

Squid can be cooked in one of two ways, either quickly over high heat or for a long time over low heat, anything in between will render it tough and chewy. Either way it has a mild flavour and firm texture and will marry well with almost any flavouring. It is suitable for a wide variety of preparations, whole tubes can be stuffed and baked, strips or rings can be dusted in seasoned flour and deep-fried or marinated and char-grilled or stir-fried. The ink can be used to flavour and colour risotto or pasta. Cuttlefish, squid's close cousin, can be substituted in almost all recipes calling for squid. They have broader, thicker bodies and their thicker calcified internal shell is most often seen in birds' cages. **T**



CHILLI SALT SQUID

This dish combines the crunch of deep-frying with the zest of chilli heat and the tang of salt; what a moreish combination! Cuttlefish or prawns are also delicious prepared this way.

Serves 6 as an entrée

1kg medium-sized squid
 ¼ cup salt flakes
 ¼ cup chilli powder (see notes)
 2 cups tapioca starch
 2 egg whites, lightly beaten
 vegetable oil, for deep-frying

1. Heat oil to 200°C. **2.** Clean squid and slice into thin strips. Crush salt and combine with chilli and tapioca starch. **3.** Dip squid into egg whites. Drain well. **4.** Dip into chilli mixture and shake off excess. **5.** Deep fry squid in 2 - 3 batches for 30 seconds. Allow oil to return to correct temperature before frying each batch. **6.** Drain well and serve immediately.

Notes: The amount of chilli powder used will vary depending on the strength of the particular powder and how hot you want the end product to be, you may choose to use less chilli powder or salt.

Recipe courtesy of Sydney Seafood School

THAI SQUID SALAD

Heady Thai flavours form a delicious marinade and dressing for this quick cooked squid salad. Cuttlefish, prawns or octopus could also be used in this recipe.

Serves 4 as an entrée

400g squid
 2 tbsp lime juice
 2 cloves garlic, chopped
 1 medium red chilli, seeded and chopped
 1 Lebanese cucumber, halved, seeds removed
 ¼ cup chopped coriander
 ¼ cup chopped mint
 2 green onions, chopped
 2 tsp sesame seeds, toasted (see note)

Dressing:

2 tbsp lime juice
 1 tbsp sweet chilli sauce
 2 tsp sesame oil
 2 tsp fish sauce
 1 tsp palm sugar

1. Clean and honeycomb squid on the inside. Place squid in a bowl with lime juice, garlic and chilli, and marinate for 15 - 20 minutes. **2.** Slice cucumber into sticks. **3.** Make dressing by combining dressing ingredients. Set aside until needed. **4.** Heat BBQ plate, brush well with oil, and cook squid until white and tender (1 - 2 minutes). **5.** Place squid in a bowl, pour dressing over the top and mix well. **6.** When squid is cool, add cucumber, coriander, mint and green onions. Sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve.

Notes: Toast sesame seeds in a frypan over a moderate heat until golden, stirring frequently.

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