

## FRIED SMELT {FISH FRIES} & HAPPY FATHER'S DAY TO MY DAD

*Fried smelt {fish fries} are a delicious preparation for fresh smelt, also perfect to serve as an appetizer or game day food. This easy fried smelt recipe is a Father's Day homage to my dad.*



San Clemente, California was my father's home between the ages of thirteen and fifteen years, it was also the birthplace of one of his fondest food memories, catching and eating grunion, smelts and sand dabs.

I have taken a modicum of artistic license with my dad's "fish" story, and it goes something like this.

My father, his three brothers, and sister, were experienced anglers and spent most of the summer fishing from piers or the shoreline of local beaches. They knew that the best time to catch grunion or smelts is right after sunset and the best way to catch them is to get into the water where they are running. Grunion, not related to smelt are easy prey for catching without a fishing pole, smelt however, can be scooped up in a fishing net just as easily.

The group would make a quick end to the California heat by gathering up tin buckets, and walking a few miles to the high cliffs off Dana Point beach. Making their way down to the surf by way of white washed wooden stairs, each was eager to catch the first glimpse of the silvery fish, flopping around on the sand. As waves crashed the shoreline and before the silversides were swept back out to sea, the group would hurry to grab up handfuls of the shining, slippery fishes, and toss them into their buckets for safe keeping. Far from the heat, feet deep in cool sand; it didn't take long for buckets to fill to the top with hundreds of writhing grunion. Their long day in the sun, finished cool and refreshed.

On the trek home they would trade fish stories from the days adventure; the sound of grumbling stomachs could be heard between the laughter and chatter. My father and his siblings hurried home, anticipating the flavors of my grandmother's deep-fried Grunion, *green beans* in bacon fat, and candied carrots.

**MY DAD WILL TELL YOU THAT GRUNION ARE THE BEST FISH HE'S EVER EATEN, BUT A BIG PLATE OF SAND DABS AND FRIED SMELT FISH FRIES WOULD DO JUST FINE.**

Crisp and nutty, the fish can be eaten whole; some brave souls even eat the innards. Although, smelt are not related to grunion, they deliver a similar delicate flavor.

*A Few Grunion Facts: "Grunion are the object of a unique recreational fishery. These fish are famous for their remarkable spawning behavior, which evokes an "I don't believe it!" response from people seeing or hearing about it for the first time.*

*Grunion leave the water at night to spawn on beaches during the spring and summer months. For four consecutive nights, beginning on the nights of the full and new moons, spawning occurs after high tides and continues for several hours. As waves break on the beach, grunion swim as far up the slope as possible. The female arches her body and excavates the semi-fluid sand with her tail to create a nest. She twists her body and digs into the sand until she is half buried, with her head sticking up. She then deposits her eggs in the nest. Males curve around the female and release milt. The milt flows down the female's body until it reaches and fertilizes the eggs. As many as eight males may fertilize the eggs in a single nest. After spawning, the males immediately retreat toward the water while the female twists free and returns with the next wave. While spawning may only take 30 seconds, some fish remain stranded on the beach for several minutes. Spawning occurs from March through August, and occasionally in February and September. Peak spawning is*

late March to early June.” SOURCE: [California Department of Fish and Wildlife](#).



## SMELT FISH 101

*A Few Smelt Facts: Any of certain slender, silvery, carnivorous, food fishes (family Osmeridae) having a small fleshy fin. Smelts live in cold northern seas, and most species spawn a short distance upstream. The American smelt (*Osmerus mordax*), introduced from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes, is the largest smelt, about 15 in. (38 cm) long. The European smelt (*O. eperlanus*) is similar. Among Pacific species are the rainbow herring, capelin, and eulachon, or candlefish, which is so oily at spawning time that it can be dried and burned as a candle. Silversides (see [grunion](#)) and other unrelated fishes are*

sometimes called smelts. SOURCE: [Wikipedia](#)

We will deal with sand dabs a different day!

To the best father in the world, Harold B. Stone

♥I Love you♥

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!



Fried Smelt aka Fish Fries

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Serves 4

This is how you make "Fish Fries"!

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#### Ingredients

1. 2 pounds fresh whole smelt
2. 1/2 cup flour
3. 1/2 cup panko crumbs
4. 1 egg
5. 1/2 cup milk
6. enough oil to deep fry fish
7. salt and pepper to taste

#### Instructions

1. Clean the tiny innards from the fish by placing your finger and thumb in the gills and pull down
2. Rinse the cleaned fish in cold water
3. Drain on a paper towel
4. Leave the heads intact (they are the best bite of all)
5. Sprinkle fish with salt and pepper
6. In a shallow dish blend together, 1/2 cup flour and 1/2 cup panko crumbs
7. In a bowl beat, 1 egg and 1/2 cup milk, add salt and pepper to taste
8. Dip fish in egg mixture
9. Toss fish in flour mixture
10. Deep fry until golden brown

## Notes

1. Serve with ketchup, tartar, or cocktail sauce

By Rebecka

Adapted from By Essie Irene Stone, my grandmother

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At Home with Rebecka <http://athomewithrebecka.com/>

I really enjoyed the flavor of the fried smelt; they taste like sardines, but less oily. The crunchy heads were the best part.



Resources: [Stripers Online Fishing Forum](#)

Smelt are not related to [Grunion California Grunion Facts](#)