

When buying passion fruit, look for large, bright yellow or purple spheres that feel heavy. (They're usually sold by the piece, so choose the largest you can.) You should be able to hear the juice slosh around when you shake them. It's normal for a passion fruit to look creased or partially deflated. In fact, if it's too round, it may not be fully ripe. Passion fruit will keep a week to 10 days in the refrigerator and can be frozen for several months. Scoop out the pulp, transfer it to ice cube trays, and freeze.

A great alternative to the fresh fruit is the frozen passion fruit purée sold at Hispanic markets and gourmet shops. The frozen pulp has the dual advantage of being inexpensive and seedless.

One passion fruit yields about 1 tablespoon intensely flavored pulp. A little goes a long way. The tiny black seeds are edible. Indeed, I rather like their brittle crunch. If you don't like the seeds you can force the flesh through a strainer, but this is somewhat of a hassle.

Whole Fried Snapper with Spicy Tomato Sauce

Pargo a la tipitapa is Nicaragua's most famous fish dish, named for the town of Tipitapa near Lake Managua. It turns up at Nicaraguan restaurants throughout Miami. The fish of choice is a snapper large enough to serve whole but small enough to be eaten by one person. For ease in eating, I suggest boning the fish before cooking (or have your fishmonger do it). If this seems too complicated, serve the fish whole.

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SERVES 4
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SPICY TOMATO SAUCE:

3 to 4 tablespoons cider vinegar

½ cup water

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

3 fresh ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped

2 medium onions, thinly sliced

2 cloves garlic, minced

2 tablespoons tomato paste

4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh Italian (flat-leaf) parsley

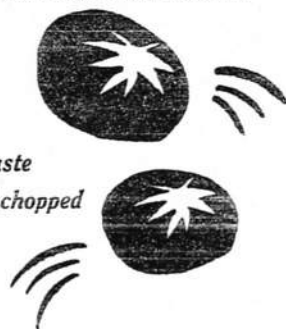
1 to 2 jalapeño chilies, seeded and diced

4 whole snappers (1½ pounds each), cleaned, gills removed, filleted if desired

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

2 cups fine cornmeal, for dredging

4 cups vegetable oil, for frying



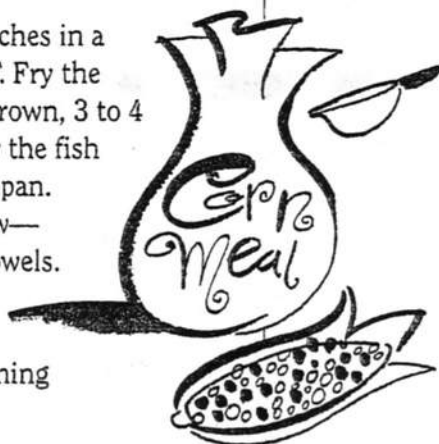
1. Prepare the sauce: Bring the vinegar, water, and salt and pepper to a boil in a nonreactive large saucepan. Add the tomatoes, onions, garlic, tomato paste, 2 tablespoons of the parsley, and the chilies and gently simmer for 5 minutes. Purée the sauce in a food processor or blender. Correct the

seasonings, adding salt and pepper to taste.

2. Just before serving, rinse the fish and pat dry. Sprinkle the fish with salt and pepper. Place the cornmeal in a large bowl. Dredge the fish in the cornmeal, shaking off the excess.

3. Pour the oil to a depth of 2 to 3 inches in a large sauté pan or wok and heat to 350°F. Fry the fish, turning as necessary, until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes total. You'll probably need to fry the fish in several batches so as not to crowd the pan. (Keep the already fried fish warm in a low—250°F—oven.) Drain the fish on paper towels.

4. Place the snapper on a platter or plates with the spicy tomato sauce spooned over it. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons parsley and serve at once.



Pan-Roasted Mutton Snapper with Raisins, Capers, and Pine Nuts

Mutton snapper is one of the largest members of the snapper family, with individual fish weighing up to 25 pounds. The flesh is white and meaty, with an elegant, delicate flavor. It's usually sold by the piece or in fillets. But any type of snapper can be substituted for mutton snapper. In other parts of the country you could use bass, cod, haddock, or mahi mahi. This recipe uses a technique called pan-roasting: The fish is lightly browned in butter, then roasted in the oven right in the skillet. This makes the skin exceptionally crisp and tasty.