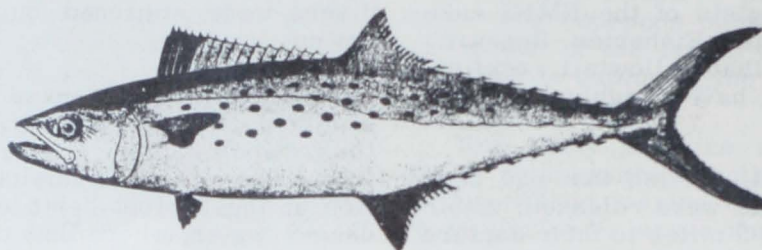


## FOOD FISH FACTS



Spanish Mackerel  
(*Scomberomorus maculatus*)

Spanish mackerel are members of a large family of fish that include the tunas and other mackerels. All of these fish, although varying greatly in size, have many common characteristics and all are fast, powerful swimmers. Members of this family live in the open sea and are more or less migratory.

Spanish mackerel are known for their spectacular leaps out of the water. Streaking up from the depths almost like a missile, these fish snatch at bait, climbing as much as 10 feet above the water before arching down and away in a furious struggle. Their spectacular actions and the fight they offer when caught make them particularly desirable to sport fishermen. Their great eating qualities and market demand make them equally desirable to commercial fishermen.

### Description

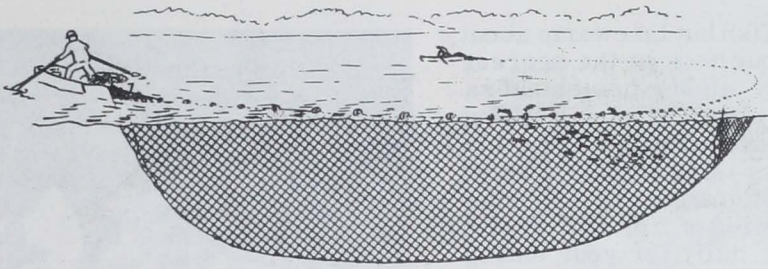
Spanish mackerel are beautifully colored fish. Their slender graceful bodies are dark blue on the upper part, paling until almost silvery on the belly. Many small yellowish or olive oval spots occur above and below the wavy lateral line on the sides and help to distinguish them. Another distinguishing char-

acteristic is the large, sharp, cone-shaped teeth. The two dorsal or top fins are spiny and are hardly separated. The first dorsal fin is long and triangular and the front one-third of this fin is black. The second dorsal fin, which is concave, and the pectoral or side fins are pale yellowish with dusky edges. A number of small finlets occur on the upper and lower body behind the fins and extend almost to the sharply curved tail. The maximum length is around 36 inches. The average fish caught, however, is about 2 to 3 pounds.

### Habitat

Spanish mackerel range along both coasts of North America. Along the Atlantic coast they are comparatively abundant from Florida to Chesapeake Bay. They are sometimes found as far north as Monhegan Island, Maine, but are rarely caught north of Cape Cod. Greater abundance is found along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Texas where they enter bays and sounds in large numbers during May and remain through September. On the Pacific coast they range from San Diego, California, to the Galapagos Islands.

(Continued following page)



Runaround Gill Net

### Spanish Mackerel Fishing

During the early years of the Spanish mackerel fishery, troll lines, gill nets, and pound nets were used in catching these fish. Today, however, commercial fishermen use gill nets almost exclusively, with a small amount taken by hook and line and troll lines. The sharp teeth of the Spanish mackerel easily cut the mesh when the gill nets were made of cotton twine or linen threads. As a result, maintenance was costly and many fish escaped. Presently the gill nets are made of synthetic materials and range from 400 to 600 yards in length and from 6 to 12 yards deep. Nearly 12 million pounds of Spanish mackerel were caught in 1968.

### Management and Conservation

Although it is known that the Spanish mackerel resource is large, it has not been fully utilized. Part of the reason was lack of sufficient information about freezing and storing this species to adequately preserve their delicate flavor. In spite of this, production and distribution of frozen Spanish mackerel had increased dramatically from 156,000 pounds in 1945 to over 3.3 million pounds in 1966. Discoveries made by scientists of the NMFS

Technological Laboratory in Pascagoula, Mississippi, have revealed why these fish, when frozen and stored, did not retain the same flavor and had shorter storage life than other species. New treatment methods recently developed at the Laboratory have changed this situation, however, and frozen Spanish mackerel fillets are in much greater demand and are finding wider markets. Service marketing specialists have helped in creating wider demand by introducing this rich Gulf resource to restaurant, institutional, and military feeders.

### Uses of Spanish Mackerel

Spanish mackerel are highly nutritious, high in protein, calcium, and phosphorus, and low in sodium and cholesterol. Part of each year's catch is sold fresh, the biggest part of catch, however, is filleted and sold either fresh or frozen. Whole fish and fillets are both popular forms and the Spanish mackerel's high oil content makes them ideal for broiling, baking, or smoking. (National Marketing Services Office, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 100 East Ohio Street, Rm. 526, Chicago, Illinois 60611.)