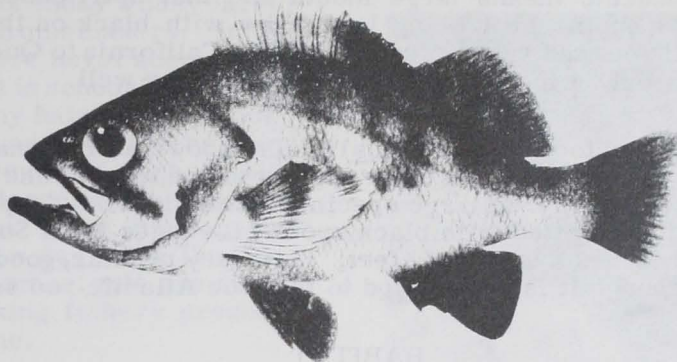


## FOOD FISH FACTS



ROCKFISH OF THE WEST COAST  
(*Sebastes* species)

More than 50 varieties of rockfish live along the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California. Many of the 50 are excellent eating, and residents within these states take full advantage of this bounty. Popular with sport fishermen as well as commercial fishermen, many rockfish give the sportsman a good fight on the end of a line. Improved commercial distribution to other areas of the United States is being planned.

## DESCRIPTION

The rockfish family, as a group, is distinguished by stout, heavily constructed bodies. The heads are large and broad and usually have prominent ridges and spines. The fins are heavily spined and care must be taken or the spines can easily injure the fisherman. The scales on rockfish are large and ridged. Rockfish vary greatly in coloration ranging from black or drab green to bright orange or crimson. As a rule the rockfish living closer to shore are less colorful than those living in deeper water. Some varieties exhibit large broad stripes and others are spotted.

All rockfish bear their young alive and in great numbers. The newly born fish range from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in length. Rockfish grow slowly compared to other groundfish. Eight to 10 years growth is needed to reach commercial size. Some rockfish have been taken that are up to 25 years old as revealed by the rings on the scales.

The following rockfish are among the best-eating varieties and are commercially important:

The orange rockfish (*Sebastes pinniger*) is a light olive-gray color with prominent orange-red coloration dominating. This fish is distinguished with three yellow-orange stripes radiating from the eyes across the head and reddish-orange streaks along the upper part of the body. It ranges from California to Southeast Alaska and is caught in deep waters. It reaches up to 30 inches in length.

The yellowtail rockfish (*Sebastes flavidus*) is not as colorful as some others but is excellent eating. It is usually grayish brown, mottled and streaked with dark brown, and washed with dusky green, showing yellow on the fins. It ranges from Southern California to Vancouver Island, lives moderately deep, and reaches about 26 inches in length.

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The bocaccio (Sebastes paucispinis) is important commercially in California. It is light green to dark brown in color, flushed with clear pale red and often has intense black spots on the body. Bocaccio means large mouth and that aptly describes this fish. The large mouth shows red on the protruding lower jaw with black on the tip. The bocaccio lives down about 40 fathoms and ranges from Southern California to Queen Charlotte Sound. It reaches a length of about 34 inches. The bocaccio freezes well.

The red rockfish (Sebastes ruberrimus) is also known as red snapper, red rock cod, or rasphead rockfish. It is deep red in color, paling to lighter red and has whitish streaks along the lateral line of the body. In large specimens coming from deep water, the body and head are often blotched and dotted with black spots. It ranges from Southern California to the Gulf of Alaska and reaches a length of 3 feet. This very popular, good eating fish is often sold as red snapper although it is not related to the true Atlantic red snapper.

#### HABITAT

Rockfish live in the north temperate seas from California to Alaska. Some species inhabit rocky shores but others live from tide-water to depths of 200 fathoms.

#### ROCKFISH FISHING

The majority of rockfish are caught with otter trawls and set line boats. A smaller amount are caught by trolling, while the ones close to shore are frequently taken on hand lines.

#### USES OF ROCKFISH

Rockfish have firm, white, fine-textured flesh and a mild flavor. Most of the commercial catch is filleted and sold fresh. However, some are sold whole dressed, and some are filleted and frozen for shipment to other areas of the United States. Rockfish fillets may be used in the same way as other fish fillets, adapting readily to pan-frying, deep-fat frying, broiling, baking, and in chowders. (Source: National Marine Fisheries Service, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, United States Department of Commerce, 100 East Ohio Street, Room 526, Chicago, Illinois 60611.)