

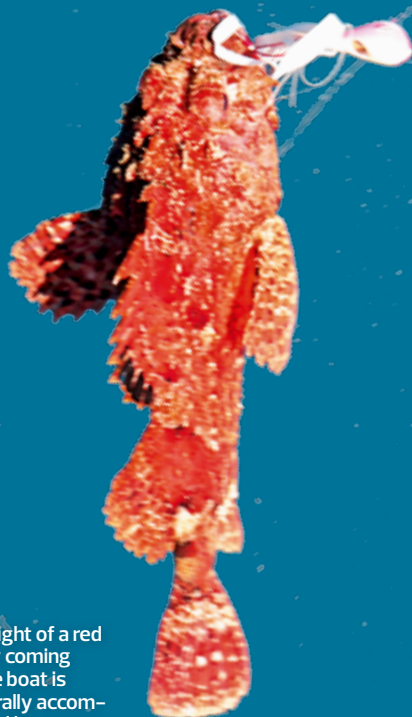
HOOK & COOK

RED ROCK COD

They may be ugly, they may be spiky, they may be the bane of snapper anglers everywhere, but they sure are tasty, too!

Words & Photos Udo Edlinger

Careful of those fingers while de-hooking a red rock cod.



The sight of a red rocky coming to the boat is generally accompanied by groans – no more!

IT'S FUNNY HOW things work out. The worst-looking horse often wins the race; an ugly and horrible-sounding boat is often the most seaworthy; the worst-looking girl at a party often has the most attractive personality... and the red rock cod (or scorpion fish) is similarly under-rated, too! It's a fish that can be caught in most of our waterways and, despite having a bad reputation, is one of the best eating.

In the past I've been a little deceptive when people around me have hooked a red rock cod. I have on more than one occasion told people that I had a hungry cat at home and asked if they'd mind me taking that rough-looking fish home rather than throw it back. Now's time for the truth... I love the taste of this fish – and I don't have a cat!

"They are full of meat and provide you with pearly-white textured flesh which rivals a coral trout"

However, this fish does pack a mean punch. Being a member of the scorpion fish family they can be quite venomous if handled the wrong way – I'm sure many of you know what I'm talking about! I once had one wriggling around the floor of my tinny and accidentally kicked it with my toe – you could have heard me scream from New Zealand! It took hours for my poor old toe to stop throbbing and the pain to subside. It's a hard lesson, but that pain, in the long run, has been worth it!

Red rock cod are often referred to as the poor man's lobster – don't ever underestimate the potential of these little beauties. Remember, beauty is in the eye of the beholder – if you're into eating freshly caught fish and can handle these with care you really should

give them a go. I would much rather eat a red rock cod than a snapper – and that's saying something! I always keep the humble red rocky for myself – they are full of meat and are quite easy to fillet, providing you with pearly-white textured flesh which rivals a coral trout.

Poor man's lobster are a by-catch and don't provide much of a fight. They are found over rough reefs and often sit camouflaged in stealth mode waiting for any passing opportunity. I've caught them using bait and plastics, and they love those newish octopus-type lures. I think the reason these lures catch so many is because you work them slowly, letting the motion of the ocean do the work, allowing the slower-moving rock cod to jump on them. They have big mouths and apart from an initial burst of energy as they attempt to get

back to their lair, they come easily. As reef dwellers, these guys haven't really been affected by commercial fishing – there is no shortage of fish here. What a sustainable fishery this could be!

These critters fetch a huge price at the markets (a lot of Asians already know how tasty they are) but, because they're easy to catch and around in great numbers, don't hand your hard-earned to a fishmonger – get out there and catch some yourself!

Udo's red rock cod

There are many ways to prepare and cook the fish including very simple fillets without using too many ingredients that overpower the amazing quality of their flesh. When I catch a larger specimen I often bake it in the oven whole and use it as an entree served with rice. They look scary, taste great and make a great topic of conversation for your guests. You will be surprised at how much flesh there is compared to their appearance.

Ingredients

- 1 tbs fresh ginger, julienned
- 1 tbs finely chopped garlic
- 1 large chilli, chopped
- Half bunch fresh coriander
- Sliced shallots
- ½ cup light soy sauce
- 3 tbs quality virgin olive oil
- 1 pinch sea salt
- 1 rock cod (preferably large)

Method

1. Place the scaled and gutted fish in an oven pan and pour the soy sauce over it. Drizzle with olive oil.
2. Sprinkle the garlic and ginger, as well as half the chilli, shallots and coriander, over the fish.
3. Cover the pan with foil.
4. Place in a pre-heated oven at 180 degrees for around 10 minutes.
5. Take off the foil and check it's cooked through by pushing a fork into the thickest part of the flesh. If the fork is warm, the fish is cooked.
6. Sprinkle remaining chilli, shallots and coriander over fish.
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8. Serve on a bed of rice.

