

Aku

skipjack tuna (*Katsuwonus pelamis*)



Skipjack tuna is commonly known as **aku** in Hawaii. Other names for this species include striped tuna, oceanic skipjack and katsuo. This near-surface schooling tuna is widely distributed across the Pacific Ocean.

Seasonality & How They Are Caught

Availability and Seasonality:

Aku was historically the single most important commercial fish species in terms of landed weight and value in Hawaii, as well as throughout much of the central and western Pacific. Today, Hawaii's aku fishery is only a fraction of what it once was, but is still extremely important. There are wide annual and seasonal fluctuations in *aku* landings. *Aku* caught in Hawaii routinely range between 4 and 15 pounds in round weight, but

larger fish (16 to 30 pounds), move into Hawaiian waters during the summer season of increased abundance (April-Sept).

Fishing Methods:

Most of Hawaii's aku catch is landed by pole-and-line fishermen who entice aku to bite on feathered, barbless hooks by chumming with live bait. The pole-and-line catch is sorted according to fish size and is initially stored and sold in bins of chilled/iced brine water. Trollers and longline boats land the remainder of the *aku* catch.

Distribution:

The pole-and-line *aku* fleet is centered on the island of Oahu. Pole-and-line caught and troll-caught aku is marketed through the fish auction in Honolulu through intermediary buyers on all islands, and

by peddlers from the roadside.

Quality

Even with the best care, *aku* has a relatively short shelf life as a high quality product compared with the other tunas. For this reason it is generally consumed within 2-5 days after landing. Pole-and-line caught aku has the longest shelf life, followed by troll and longline-caught fish. **Aku** keeps longer if it is stored whole (especially if head down) and is not filleted until shortly before use.

It is not uncommon to find small worms in the belly flaps of *aku*. Studies have shown that these parasites are only an aesthetic quality issue and are not a public health risk. *Aku* belly is merely trimmed and typically fried



Product Forms and Yields:

Aku is sold in various forms: whole fish, fillets, in raw fish preparations or as dried aku sticks. Most of the aku catch is sold fresh and quickly consumed, but any surpluses caught during the peak summer season are sometimes dried. The yield of fillet from whole fish varies from 45% for small *aku* to 60% for large *aku*.

Color, Taste, Texture:

Good quality *aku* has firm flesh that has a deep, dark red color. Flesh color varies with the size of the fish, with smaller fish having a lighter red color than larger fish. Larger *aku* are preferable for raw fish preparations because they tend to have a greater fat content than smaller *aku*, another desirable attribute. Cooked *aku* becomes light gray in color. *Aku* has a more pronounced taste than *ahi* or *a'u*.

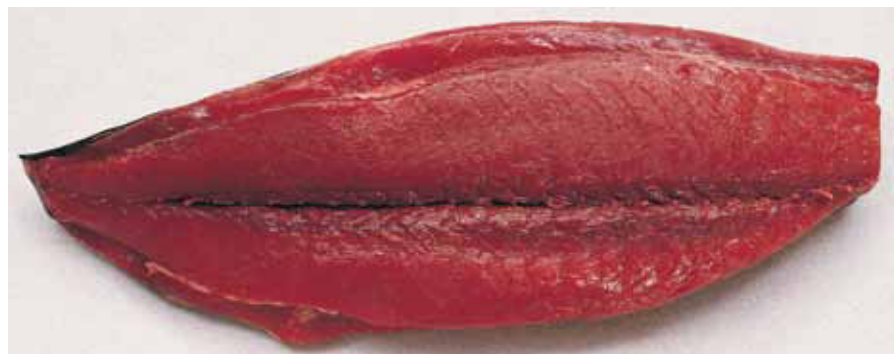
Preparations:

Aku is the preferred species for many ethnic seafood dishes, especially poke (traditional Hawaiian raw fish preparation). Many Japanese, Hawaiian and other Pacific Island consumers prefer *sashimi* prepared from large *aku* to that from *ahi*. Grilled “*aku* bone” (the backbone of a filleted fish which retains thin strips of flesh) is a local favorite food among certain ethnic groups in Hawaii, as are *aku* roe and dried *aku*. *Aku* can be cooked in many different ways, but is usually broiled over hot coals, sautéed or fried. The

meat cooks quickly and can easily dry out if overcooked.

Historical Note

Aku figures prominently in Hawaiian legends. According to one legend, while voyaging to settle in Hawaii from the South Seas, a chief and his party were caught in a storm which threatened to swamp their canoes. In response to the prayers of the sailors, a school of *aku* appeared and calmed the rough waters. To honor this fish, it was forbidden for Hawaiians to eat *aku* for a few days each year.



Hawaii Seafood Council

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