

- Prep Time: 15 minutes
 - Cook Time: 20 minutes (total, in batches)
 - Marinate Time: 2 hours (minimum)
 - Total Time: 2 hours 35 minutes
 - Servings: 4-6 people
 - Intensity Level: Medium (Requires attention to oil temperature and quick handling)
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Ingredients

The Fish & Soak:

- 6 (6 to 8-ounce) catfish fillets (fresh is best, but frozen and thawed works too)
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce (Louisiana-style preferred)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper

The Dredge:

- 1 ½ cups yellow cornmeal (medium grind)
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning (such as Tony Chachere's)
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder

- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional, for heat)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper

For Frying:

- 6 cups peanut oil (or canola oil), for deep frying
- Lemon wedges, for serving
- Tartar sauce and hot sauce, for serving

Instructions

Step 1: The Buttermilk Soak (Time: 5 Minutes Active / 2 Hours Inactive)

In a large shallow dish or a gallon-sized zip-top bag, combine the buttermilk, hot sauce, salt, and pepper. Add the catfish fillets, ensuring they are fully submerged. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, or up to 8 hours. *Why?* The acid in the buttermilk tenderizes the fish and

breaks down any “muddy” flavors, while the hot sauce adds a subtle background kick.

Step 2: Prepare the Dredge (Time: 5 Minutes)

In a separate large bowl or pie plate, whisk together the cornmeal, flour, Creole seasoning, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, cayenne, salt, and pepper. Mix thoroughly.

Note: If you prefer a thicker crust, add an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of flour.

Step 3: Heating the Oil (Time: 10 Minutes)

Pour the peanut oil into a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or cast-iron skillet. You want about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches of oil depth.

Heat Intensity: Medium-High.

Attach a deep-fry thermometer. Heat the oil until it reaches 350°F (175°C) . *Crucial Tip:* Do not let the oil smoke. If it starts smoking, reduce the heat immediately. Maintaining this temperature is key; if the oil is too cool, the fish will be greasy; if too hot, the crust will burn before the fish cooks through.

Step 4: Dredging (Time: 10 Minutes)

Working with one fillet at a time, remove it from the buttermilk and allow the excess liquid to drip off. Dredge the fillet in the cornmeal mixture. Press the mixture firmly onto the fish to ensure it adheres. Shake off any excess powder. Place the coated fillets on a wire rack while you finish the batch. *Intensity:* Low (but keep your hands dry).

Step 5: The Fry (Time: 4-6 Minutes per Batch)

Carefully lower 2 to 3 fillets into the hot oil using tongs. Do not overcrowd the pan; overcrowding drops the oil temperature and results in soggy fish.

Time: Fry for 4 to 5 minutes on the first side, then flip and fry for another 2 to 3 minutes on the second side.

Intensity: High. You must monitor the oil temperature constantly. Adjust the burner dial to keep the oil between 340°F and 350°F. The fish is done when it is golden brown and floats

slightly, and the internal temperature reaches 145°F.

Step 6: Drain and Rest (Time: 5 Minutes)

Remove the fish from the oil using a spider strainer or tongs. Place them on a wire rack set over a baking sheet (or a plate lined with paper towels) to drain excess oil. *Do not stack the fish*; stacking creates steam and softens the crust. Salt lightly immediately after removing from the oil.

Serving Suggestions

Serve this Southern Fried Catfish hot with fresh lemon wedges, homemade tartar sauce, and a few dashes of hot sauce. Traditional sides include hushpuppies, coleslaw, and French fries, or a slice of white bread (the “Southern slider”).

Nutrition Information

Disclaimer: Nutritional values are estimates and will vary based on the size of the fillets and the amount of oil absorbed during frying. This analysis is for one serving (based on 6 servings) assuming a portion of the oil is absorbed.

- Calories: 480 kcal
- Total Fat: 24g (Saturated Fat: 5g)
- Cholesterol: 105mg

- Sodium: 890mg
- Total Carbohydrate: 28g (Dietary Fiber: 2g, Sugars: 3g)
- Protein: 35g