

Crispy Italian Fried Baccalà

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Fried baccalà has always meant tradition in our home. It's one of those dishes that instantly brings me back to the kitchen during the holidays, where the smell of hot oil and salt-cured cod filled the air and everyone hovered nearby, waiting for the first crisp piece to come out of the pan. This wasn't fancy food—it was humble, honest cooking, passed down through generations and made with care and patience.

Baccalà itself has a long history in Italian cooking. Long before refrigeration, salt-curing cod made it possible to preserve fish for months, making it accessible even in inland regions of Italy. Over time, it became a staple for special occasions and meatless days, especially Christmas Eve. Each region has its own way of preparing it, but fried baccalà—lightly battered and golden—remains one of the simplest and most beloved preparations. With just flour and cold water, the batter stays delicate, allowing the fish to shine, exactly the way it was always meant to be enjoyed.

Things to know about this crispy Italian fried baccalà

- **Soaking time matters:** Properly desalted baccalà should taste mild, not salty. Start tasting after 24 hours and continue soaking if needed.
- **Keep the batter cold:** Using ice-cold water creates a lighter, crisper coating when it hits the hot oil.
- **Don't overcrowd the pan:** Fry in batches so the oil temperature stays steady and the baccalà fries evenly.

- **Serve immediately:** Fried baccalà is best enjoyed hot and crisp, straight from the pan.
- If you love traditional Italian seafood dishes, don't miss my **Baccala with Potatoes** recipe or the best Italian- style fried calamari another classic that's always on our table for Christmas Eve. Serve them together for a truly authentic Italian meal, and be sure to explore the blog for more time-honored Italian recipes passed down through generations.





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Servings

4–6 servings

Prep Time

15 minutes (after soaking)

Cook Time

15–20 minutes

Total Time

30–35 minutes (plus soaking time)

Ingredients

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds salt-cured baccala (cod), soaked and desalted
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 to $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups **ice-cold water**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper (optional)
- Vegetable oil or light olive oil, for frying
- Lemon wedges, for serving

Optional Garnish

- Chopped fresh parsley

Instructions

1. Soak the Baccalà

Rinse the salt-cured baccala under cold running water. Place it in a large bowl, cover completely with cold water, and refrigerate for **24–48 hours**, changing the water **2–3 times daily**.

Taste a small piece to ensure it's properly desalted.

2. Prepare the Fish

Drain the baccala well and pat it **very dry** with paper towels. Cut into **2–3 inch pieces** of similar thickness for even

cooking.

3. Make the Batter

In a bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, and pepper if using. Gradually add the **ice-cold water**, whisking just until a smooth, pourable batter forms.

The consistency should be similar to a light pancake batter—thin enough to drip, but thick enough to coat the fish.

4. Heat the Oil

Heat about **1 inch of oil** in a wide, heavy skillet over **medium-high heat** until it reaches **350°F**.

(If you don't have a thermometer, a drop of batter should sizzle and float immediately.)

5. Batter the Baccalà

Dip each piece of fish into the batter, letting excess drip off, then carefully place into the hot oil. Fry in batches—do not overcrowd the pan.

6. Fry Until Golden

Fry for **3–4 minutes per side**, turning once, until the baccalà is crisp, golden, and puffed. The interior should be tender and flaky.

Second

And so on