

Seafood as self care: My year of eating community-supported fish

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The oysters at ala Mar Kitchen & Bar, Thursday, July 18, 2019, in Oakland, Calif. Santiago Mejia / The Chronicle 2019

In our ignorance about the year to come, many of us made some weird decisions at the start of lockdown: bought stuff we didn't really need; made fluffy [Dalgona coffee](#); freaked out over the ethics of wearing masks; told our co-workers, "See you in two weeks." I got [a fish subscription](#).

For almost a year now, I've been receiving random fish and seafood in a bag from [Sea Forager](#), [a local Community Supported Fisheries \(CSF\) company](#), picking it up from a neighbor's cooler once every two weeks. It gave me a welcome sense of routine this year: Wednesdays were fish days, and I had to get out of my apartment to go fetch it no matter how nebulous and goo-like I was feeling. With just two portions of food in each bag, the CSF shares are less intimidating for a DINK (dual income, no kids) couple than overflowing, cornucopia-like farm boxes, and the

fresh fish are freezable, so you don't necessarily have to deal with it immediately. (Though cooking it the same day is always ideal.)

Sea Forager's halibut, oysters and albacore tuna are fished or harvested sustainably, mostly from Bay Area fishermen. Usually, the bay's haul is exported to overseas markets; Sea Forager is a rare opportunity for Bay Area households to get local seafood into their kitchens. When shelter-in-place hit the Bay Area last March, demand for the CSF skyrocketed as residents sought out ways to reduce their grocery trips: Founder Kirk Lombard told *The Chronicle* that Sea Forager enrolled a year's worth of new subscribers in a five-day period.

San Francisco is slowly [shedding its pandemic-era restrictions on businesses like restaurants and salons](#), and entry into the state's less-strict yellow tier of reopening seems imminent. At first, when I assumed that the pandemic would be over in two shakes of a lamb's tail, I figured I would cancel my subscription in a month or so. But I think I'm going to stick with it for as long as I can afford to do so.

The routine continues to ground me in ways that I never could have foreseen. Sea Forager's products arrive mostly cleaned, but there's a faint DIY element to them that I've come to delight in. Live Manila clams need to be soaked several times before cooking; I also scrub the rough shells with a toothbrush to loosen any lingering grit. I run my fingers over fillets to find the familiar prickle of pinbones, which I carefully tweeze out while listening to the neo soul sounds of [Angie Stone](#). I dwell in my memories while shucking oysters, remembering sunny Mardi Gras days in New Orleans when I would set up camp with a bag of them to grill with butter and bacon while watching the parades float by.

On Mondays, when Lombard alerts subscribers to what they'll likely be receiving, I spend my lunch hour looking up recipes in my copy of "[The Pacific Northwest Seafood Cookbook](#)" (Countryman Press, 2019) by Naomi Tomky, which has treated me to some truly amazing miso-marinated rockfish tacos.

In a strange way, taking care of this fish has felt like taking care of me. In a time when I have felt so disembodied, it makes me feel like a part of the world again — as real and mammalian as an otter cracking a sea urchin with a stone.