

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE.

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SEA MUSSELS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW TO COOK THEM

With Eighteen Recipes.¹

The sea mussel, one of the best and most abundant of sea foods, furnishes an example of waste of natural resources in America through failure to utilize it. In Europe the sea mussel is one of the most highly regarded shellfishes. Great Britain and Ireland consume about 35,000,000 pounds and little Holland over 65,000,000 pounds a year. In France about 400,000,000 pounds are produced



The Sea Mussel.

annually and cooked in ways to delight the epicure. Yet in the United States practically none are used except as bait or fertilizer.

DELICIOUS, NUTRITIOUS, WHOLESOME, CHEAP.

Sea mussels are closely related to clams and oysters. They should not, however, be confounded with the fresh-water mussel. As a

¹ Furnished by Mr. Charles Doucot, chef, Hotel Brunswick, Boston, Mass.

nutritious and wholesome food they are equal to either clams or oysters, and many persons regard them as superior in flavor. They rarely fail to please the taste of the lover of sea foods, and the experiment of having them presented on the menus of some of the prominent hotels and restaurants in Boston has met with immediate success. Patrons who have tried them have asked for them again, and they have become recognized features at hotels whose chefs a few weeks before were ignorant of the fact that they could be readily obtained in the United States.

Since they are abundant and easily taken, sea mussels are cheap. They are found in dense beds yet untouched, accessible to the markets, and easily reached by tongs and dredges. They can be placed on the markets at a lower cost than can either oysters or clams, and a barrel of mussels contains more edible material than a barrel of oysters. The quantity of actual nutriment contained in the edible portions (the meat and liquor) of mussels is slightly greater than in oysters and clams, and the mussel therefore contains at least as much food, pound for pound, as is found in related shellfish in common use. As the shells are thinner, a bushel of mussels contains considerably more foodstuff than an equal quantity of oysters.

A peck of mussels in the shell will supply all of the meat required for a meal for 10 persons.

Sea mussels are among the most easily digestible of foods, as has been demonstrated not only by scientific experiment, but by the experience of consumers. The human body is able to use practically all of the nutriment contained in the meats and liquor of mussels. Persons of weak digestion have found that they can eat mussels with impunity when meats cause distress. Being palatable, nutritious, digestible, wholesome, and cheap, mussels are food for rich and poor, the well and the sick.

IN SEASON ALL THE YEAR.

From the standpoint of both dealer and consumer sea mussels possess the advantage of being in season when oysters are out of season. The American oyster, which is the best in the world, probably will never be displaced from its present eminent position in the regard of the public, and now that its freedom from contamination is being assured through the activities of the United States and many State governments, its popularity should increase. But comparatively few oysters are marketed from April to September, and this is the season at which mussels are at their best on the coast of the New England and Middle Atlantic States. Thus they constitute a supply of shellfish at a time when the oyster is unobtainable, and oyster dealers may handle them with profit during an otherwise slack season.

The seacoast resorts may be easily supplied at small expense, for sea mussels are found on the Atlantic coast from the Arctic Ocean to North Carolina, and on the Pacific coast as far south as San Francisco. Along the shore of New England, New York, and New Jersey they exist in beds of great productiveness.

WHEN NOT TO USE SEA MUSSELS.

Sea mussels are wholesome, but, as in the case of all animal foods, there are conditions under which they should not be gathered or eaten. Dead or stale mussels are apt to contain the same dangerous decomposition products, ptomaines, as are found in other stale or putrifying animal foods. They should be alive when purchased, and this can be determined by observing if the shells be closed. If the shells gap the mussels are either dead or weak and possibly dying, and should not be used.

Mussels, like oysters, should not be used from sewage-polluted waters and, therefore, should not be taken from the vicinity of towns or on densely inhabited shores. They should not be taken from pilings, rocks, or shores exposed at low water, as in such locations they may become polluted or the liquor may become slightly decomposed by exposure to the warm air and sun. If these simple precautions be observed, mussels will be found to be a safe and healthful sea food.

HOW TO PREPARE AND COOK SEA MUSSELS.

For use in the fresh state, mussels will be purchased in the shell, and consumers should be careful to wash them well before cooking. The only inedible part, except the shell, is the little tuft of black hairs known as the byssus, or beard, which is readily detached after cooking.

Canned mussels of good quality, preserved either in their own juice or pickled in vinegar and spices, are now prepared by a few firms on both Atlantic and Pacific coasts. Thus prepared they retain their tenderness and most of their natural flavor.

Mussels may be cooked in the same ways as oysters and clams, and in other ways distinctly their own. The accompanying recipes are recommended:

Recipes

1. *Steamed mussels.*—Wash and clean thoroughly; place in closely covered saucepan or kettle after adding about a cup of water to one-half peck of mussels. Boil 10 to 12 minutes, until they are all well opened. Strain the broth and serve the mussels on a large platter. Serve them with some melted butter, and a cup of broth to each person. Remove the byssus, or beard, and eat same as steamed clams. One-half peck of mussels will serve five people.

2. *Roasted mussels*.—Wash and clean thoroughly as usual. Place in a pan and bake in hot oven until they are all opened. Remove one shell, taking care not to lose the liquor, and arrange on plates. Serve one-fourth pound of melted butter with them.

3. *Fried mussels à la Colbert*.—Wash and clean as usual. Steam until shell opens. Remove the meats from the shells, and take out the beard; then roll in flour, dip in two eggs beaten with one-half cup of milk, and roll in bread crumbs. Fry in hot fat or oil. Drain and dry well on a napkin. Serve hot with a Colbert sauce made as follows: Boil down a gill of brown sauce and meat extract the size of a nut; while whipping the sauce put in 2 ounces of butter, the juice of a lemon, and some chopped parsley.

4. *Mussel broth*.—Wash and clean as usual. Place in closely covered kettle, adding a pint of water to one-half peck of mussels, a sliced onion, and a piece of celery, if at hand. Boil until the mussels are all opened. Strain the broth and serve in cups. A little whipped cream may be served on the side. The mussels used for that purpose can be saved for creamed, patties, etc.

5. *Mussel chowder, New England style*.—Clean and cook the mussels as usual. Remove the meat; take out the beard, preserving the broth or liquor in another dish. To a half peck of mussels take 3 ounces of salt pork, cut in small dice, and fry in a kettle; add two onions, sliced, and cook well, but do not let brown; add a teaspoonful of flour; stir well. Then add the liquor with the same amount of water. Let it come to a boil, and add three potatoes sliced thin. Boil slowly until they are done, then add the mussels and a pint of boiling milk. Season well, and serve with pilot or soft crackers.

6. *Mussel croquettes*.—Clean and scald the mussels as usual. After removing the meats from the shell, take out the "beard," and cut the mussels in very small dice. Make a cream sauce, using 2 ounces of butter, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of flour, one-half pint of hot milk, one-half pint of hot mussel liquor; boil it down until thick enough; add the mussel meats and the yolks of two eggs; mix well, and put in a pan to cool. When thoroughly cold, shape into croquettes, bread in the usual way, and fry in very hot fat. Drain and serve on a folded napkin garnished with parsley.

7. *Mussel fritters*.—Clean the mussels as usual and steam until all are opened. Remove the meats; chop them up not too fine. Make a batter with 4 ounces of flour, teaspoonful of olive oil, three eggs, salt and pepper, and one-half teaspoonful of baking powder. Mix well and add some of the mussel liquor to thin out. Mix in the mussel meats and fry in hot fat a golden brown.

8. *Mussel chowder, New York style*.—Take one-half peck mussels, clean, wash, and steam. Strain the liquor and keep hot in a separate dish. Take the meats out of the shell, remove the byssus, and cut mussels in two if large; if not, leave whole. In another kettle fry 3 ounces of salt pork cut in very small dice. When well fried, add two onions and one green pepper, cut in small dice also; fry a few minutes; add the liquor with the same quantity of water and two large potatoes diced; boil until the potatoes are cooked; add two tomatoes, peeled and chopped up; boil a few minutes more. Put in the mussels and sprinkle a little thyme leaves and serve.

9. *Creamed mussels*.—Prepare the mussels as usual. Make a cream sauce thus: Take 3 ounces of butter, place in saucepan, when melted add 2 ounces of sifted flour. Stir well while cooking and do not let the mixture get brown. Add a pint of hot milk and one-half pint of mussel liquor and cook 30 minutes. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Strain and add mussel meats. Serve on toast, or in patties, shells, croustades, etc.

10. *Mussels à la Provençale*.—Prepare and clean as usual. Take two tablespoonfuls of olive oil, place in frying pan or spider, let it get hot until it begins

to smoke; throw in the mussel meats, the beards removed, with some finely chopped onions and a little garlic. Fry a few minutes and serve.

11. *Mussels on the half shell Bourguignonne*.—After cleaning and steaming the mussels as usual, remove the top shell. Then prepare one-fourth pound of butter with a few cloves of garlic and some parsley chopped very fine. Mix thoroughly and spread a piece of it the size of a nut on each mussel. Place in hot oven a few minutes and serve sizzling, garnished with quartered lemon and parsley.

12. *Mussels on the half shell à la Marinier*.—Clean and steam the mussels as usual, adding one-half cup of water and one-half cup of white wine to one-half peck of mussels. Strain the liquor and make a Marinier sauce as follows: Chop a large onion very fine, fry in 2 ounces of butter, but do not let it get brown; add 1 ounce of flour, stir well, and add the liquor; boil 30 minutes; season to taste; add some chopped parsley; and pour over the mussels, which have been previously placed on a hot platter on the half shell.

13. *Mussels à la poulette*.—Operate in the same manner as for the Marinier style. Omit the white wine, add a yolk of egg and some sliced mushrooms to the sauce.

14. *Mussels à la Catalane*.—Clean and wash as usual. Steam in covered kettle with an onion cut coarse, some parsley, and whole white pepper. When cooked remove the beards and the top shell. Make a sauce by frying a finely chopped onion in 2 ounces of butter, adding 1 ounce of flour, the liquor from the mussels, and season to taste. Cook 15 to 20 minutes; add the juice of a lemon. Cover the mussels with the sauce, sprinkle over them some bread crumbs and a little melted butter, and brown in hot oven.

15. *Mussels à la Mornay*.—Operate as for creamed mussels, adding a little grated Parmesan cheese to the cream sauce. Cover the mussels on the half shell with sauce, sprinkle a little grated cheese over them, and brown in hot oven.

16. *Pickled mussels*.—Clean and steam in the usual way. Take out the meats and place in a bowl with one carrot and two onions sliced very thin, 10 grains of whole white pepper, three cloves, one-fourth ounce of salt, 10 grains of allspices, one small red pepper if any handy, one-half pint of good vinegar, one-half pint of mussel liquor, and two tablespoonfuls of olive oil, one clove of garlic. They are ready to eat after a few hours.

17. *Sea-mussel stew*.—One-half peck of mussels steamed and cleaned as usual. Remove the meats from the shells and place in a soup tureen with their own liquor. Add a pint of boiling milk, 4 ounces of butter, salt and pepper to taste, and serve piping hot with oyster crackers.

18. *Sea mussels à la Newburg*.—After thoroughly cleaning one-half peck of mussels, steam them as usual. Remove the meats from the shells and place them in a saucepan, adding a glass or cupfull of their liquor and a pint of heavy cream and a glass of good sherry wine. Season to taste with salt, nutmeg, and cayenne pepper; place on the fire and bring to a boil. Then have ready in a dish 3 ounces of butter and the yolks of two eggs mixed together in a paste. Pour in the saucepan, stirring the mixture on the range all the time till it comes to the boiling point, but do not let it boil. Serve in chafing dish with toasted bread around.

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