

# Oysters- autumn harvest delight

by Lydia Lovell

Not since the end of April have the Lovells eaten oysters. No, we don't think the succulent bivalve is any less delicious or nutritious in months without an R; we were just brought up to believe that from May through August, oysters breed, feed and fatten, so we wait until September, the beginning of a new oyster season.

It's a little like waiting until native asparagus comes on the market around the first of May, even though shipped-in crops are available earlier. Or making do with canned or frozen peas until, in June, we harvest our own. Or passing up waxed cucumbers because before July is out, cukes will hang on the sprawling vines in the garden.

Now begins the oyster season. But decisions, once we've a supply in the refrigerator, must be made. It takes, practically, an Act of Congress to reach unanimity. Five choices are offered: stewed, scalloped, fried, broiled, or raw. When Aunt Olivia ran things, she had a rule regarding choices; the rule was that agreement must be reached. "This kitchen isn't run like a restaurant," she'd say with a smile. "You all get together, now, and decide how you want them. Then I'll fix them."

It wasn't as though we couldn't look forward to eating oysters in a variety of ways in coming weeks. We knew we could and we knew we would. The challenge was to start off the season in the best way of all, this very first time since late spring. Ours was the sort of family that enjoyed contemplating delicacies to come; anticipation was nearly as pleasurable as realization. So we'd sit around the table after lunch to talk about oysters.

"Maybe fried would be best to begin with. I can just about smell them, all golden and crispy outside, hot and juicy inside."

"Me too. But what about on the half shell? Is anything more oyster-y than a raw oyster, right in its shell, with a squirt of lemon?"

"Mmm. Or oyster stew. Now that's a supper fit for royalty. With plenty of oyster crackers and butter floating on top, I bet I could eat three big bowlsful."

"Eyes bigger'n your stomach! How about having 'em broiled tonight? Don't think we've had broiled oysters since sometime last February."

"Don't you just love scalloped oysters though? All rich and bubbly and creamy and buttery? Oh, I just know it would melt in my mouth!"

About then Aunt Olivia would offer, "I've run across an oyster recipe I've never tried before. It's for creamed oysters. Maybe you'd like to try that for a change. It sounds as though it would be good..."

The whole family would then turn to look at her with shock and consternation. "Creamed oysters? Who ever heard of creamed oysters?"

"Well, I thought I'd throw it in as a suggestion. Might help you make up your minds."

Without hesitation, the Lovells rejected the notion. Nothing could be better than the traditional ways. "Stick-in-the-mud!" Aunt Olivia



Sometimes the final decision would be oyster stew; sometimes the Lovells would settle on scalloped oysters. One was as popular as the other. And, however they came, everyone was satisfied. Before the lunch dishes were finished, consensus was always reached.

Aunt Olivia knew the primary rule for preparing oysters. Cook them quickly. To retain the delicate, distinctive flavor and tender plumpness, they must not be overcooked. To make oyster stew, place a fine mesh strainer in a bowl and pour into it a pint of oysters. Reserve liquor. With fingers, remove any shell fragments from the oysters. Melt 1/4 cup butter or margarine in a large heavy saucepan. Add oysters and liquor to hot fat and cook **only** until edges of oysters begin to curl. A few minutes is enough. Then add a quart of heated milk (not scalded, just good and warm). Add 1/4 tsp. salt and 1/8 tsp pepper; heat thoroughly but do not boil. Serve with plenty of oyster crackers as soon as the stew is steaming. Garnish each bowlful with a shake or two of paprika. The recipe makes six bowls. Double the recipe if more than four oyster-stew-lovers will be at the table. This meal is remarkably filling.

If our choice was **Scalloped Oysters**, Aunt Olivia began by crushing with her rolling pin enough Pilot crackers to make 2 cups of coarse crumbs. These she combined with 1/2 cup melted margarine or butter, 1/2 tsp. salt, 1/8 tsp. pepper, and a shake of Worcestershire sauce, all mixed well. Then she drained and cleaned the oysters, reserving the liquor. With one third of the crumb mixture she lined the bottom of a well-

greased quart casserole, covered the crumbs with a layer of oysters using about one cup; then came another third of crumbs and the rest of the oysters; and finally, add the rest of the crumbs. To the reserved liquor she added enough cold milk to make one cup. This she poured carefully and slowly into the casserole which then spent about 30 minutes in a 350° oven.

A sliced tomato, cucumber and sweet onion salad sprinkled with oregano and laced with oil and vinegar dressing sufficed for six of us if a rich and hearty dessert ended the meal.

For **Broiled Oysters**, Aunt Olivia needed three dozen unshucked oysters. She left the shucking to an expert, knowing it was no job for a novice. Once they were opened, she arranged the deep half of each shell in a broiler pan, cleaned the oysters of shell shards, and placed one oyster in each shell. After combining 1/4 cup soft bread crumbs, 1/2 t. salt, 1/8 tsp. pepper, and 1/8 tsp. paprika, she sprinkled a few crumbs over the top. Then she cut up 4 slices of raw bacon into small pieces and divided the bacon evenly among the 36 shells. When everything else was ready, she ran these under the broiler, about 3 inches from the heat, for 5 to 7 minutes or until the edges curled and the bacon was browned. Six to a customer served 6.

For an **Oyster Fry**, Aunt Olivia style, beat together 2 eggs, 2 tbsp. evaporated milk, and add 1/4 tsp. salt. In a saucer, put 1/3 cup of flour. In a small bowl, put 2 cups saltine cracker crumbs. In a large frying pan, put 1/2 cup margarine and 1/2 cup cooking oil. About 15 or 20 minutes before ready to serve, dip each oyster in eggs, then lightly in flour, into eggs again, and finally roll in cracker crumbs. Place on a large sheet of waxed paper until all are ready to fry. Let stand at least 5 minutes; 10 is better. Heat oil and margarine over moderate heat to 350°. Fry oysters 5 to 7 minutes, turning once, until golden. Drain on paper towelling. Serve with cocktail sauce. A pint of fried oysters serves 6.

At Aunt Olivia's, nobody ever put in an order for **Creamed Oysters**, but this is the recipe she would have used had anyone risked it. Simmer a pint of cleaned oysters in their own liquor for 3 to 5 minutes until edges curl. Remove oysters; reserve liquor. Prepare a sauce using 2 tbsp. melted margarine, 2 tbsp. flour, and a mixture of the reserved liquor, a cup of dry white wine, and enough water to make 2 cups. Stir constantly while heating to a boil and until sauce thickens. Add oysters. Fill patty shells or spoon onto buttered toast points. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and a little paprika just before placing the plates before six hungry oyster-lovers.

Green peas are a good vegetable with oysters, but if carrots are preferred in your family, try this. Slice raw carrots into rounds and boil about 15 minutes. When carrots are just fork tender, drain well and add a tbsp. of margarine to the hot pan. Cover and shake pan to coat carrots. Mince 2 tbsp. parsley and sprinkle over carrots. Cover and allow to steam at lowest burner setting 5 to 7 minutes.

September has come again. Labor Day is behind us. Traffic seems as heavy as ever, but there's one consolation; oyster season is open once more.