

# Musts for Mussels

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Everyone who visits or lives on Cape Cod knows about clam chowder. Clam chowder probably appears more often on the menus of restaurants from Buzzards Bay to Provincetown than any other single item. Lots of us buy clams and make our own chowders. One may even purchase a respectable chowder in a can from a supermarket; just add milk, a dab of butter, heat and serve.

And most of us know about scallops, lobsters, oysters, crabs and clams... steamed, fried, and in pie as well as in chowder. Some of us were so young when we were taught to tell the difference between a quahaug and a soft-shelled clam we can't remember not knowing. And yet, only a relative handful of native Cape Codders consider mussels edible; fewer still consider them a delicacy. Among the Lovells, however, anyone bringing a bucket of fresh-gathered mussels from the shores of Barnstable Harbor (always an excellent place to harvest a mess of them) is welcome, indeed. In Aunt Olivia's day, it was cause for celebration for she was expert at their preparation.

A first step in cooking mussels is ridding them of sand and grit. Uncle Henry kept a small wire brush hung on a nail in the shed and he used it exclusively for scrubbing mussels and removing their beards (the tough mossy growth they produce to attach themselves to rocks). If you don't own such a brush, you can accomplish the same thing with a paring knife; it just takes longer.

Once the outsides of the shells are cleaned, soak the bivalves in a bucket of cold fresh water for a couple of hours; drain and rinse them several times. Test to be sure each one

closes its shell when you handle it, and discard any that shows no signs of life.

Now comes the time to decide how you will serve the mussels.

A simple and easy way, one that appeals to purists for whom these shellfish need no disguise, is **Steamed Mussels**.

In a deep saucepan combine the following ingredients:

3/4 C. water	1 clove minced garlic
1 C. cider vinegar	1/4 t. dried thyme
1/2 a small onion, chopped	1 T. chopped parsley

Bring the mixture to a simmer; add 12-16 mussels per serving. Cover and steam until the shells open (5 to 7 minutes). Remove mussels from broth with a slotted spoon and keep warm until ready to serve. Add 2 T. butter to the broth and thicken by stirring in 2 T. flour mixed in a measuring cup with 1/4 C. warm water until smooth. Cook, stirring, four or five minutes. Serve sauce in custard cups placed in center of large soup plates and surrounded by mussels that may be dipped in the sauce as each tender morsel is removed from its shell.

In Europe, and particularly in France and Italy, mussels are savoured by gourmets; we require not a single drop of either French or Italian blood in our veins to appreciate **Mussels in White Wine**.

In a small skillet, melt 1/4 C. butter, add 1/2 C. chopped scallions, and saute until golden. Add a minced clove of garlic and two pinches of oregano. In a large heavy cooking pot with a close-fitting cover, bring 1/2 C. dry white wine to a boil, add two pinches of crushed bay leaf, and simmer for two minutes. Combine scallions with wine. Then put in three quarts of clean mussels (still in their shells), and cover tightly. Bring to a quick boil and cook for six to eight minutes over high heat, shaking the pan during cooking to heat mussels evenly. With a slotted spoon, transfer mussels to heated bowls. Pour some sauce over the mussels and sprinkle each serving with chopped fresh parsley.

Caesar salad goes well with Mussels in White Wine, but any tossed green salad will satisfy. Do be sure, however, to pass a basket of French or Italian bread, hot from an oven, to use for sopping up sauce while the mussels are consumed.

There will always be someone...like the occasional outsider who somehow manages to marry into the Lovell family...who finds steamed mussels (or steamed clams, for that matter) more work than they are worth. People such as these delight in being served Aunt Olivia's **Deville Mussels**.

2 qts. shucked mussels with liquor	1/4 C. ketchup
1/4 C. salad oil	8 drops Tabasco
1/2 C. minced onion	Juice of one lemon
2 C. cracker crumbs	1/4 C. minced fresh parsley
2 T. Worcestershire sauce	1 T. butter

In a medium-sized saucepan, heat mussels in their own juice or liquor, but do not boil. When hot, set aside. In a large skillet, heat oil and saute minced onion. While onions are cooking, combine cracker crumbs, Worcestershire sauce, ketchup, Tabasco, lemon juice, and parsley. (Aunt Olivia always used Uneeda biscuits that she crushed between sheets of wax paper with her rolling pin. You may want to place crackers in a plastic bag to make crumbs.)

Stir crumb mixture into oil and onions. Fold in the heated mussels together with their liquor. Turn mixture into a shallow well-greased baking pan or casserole. Top with dots of butter and bake in a 425° oven for 15 to 20 minutes. This recipe will serve eight, but four hungry Lovells will polish off the entire panful at one sitting.

Should any be left, wrap in foil, refrigerate, and reheat before serving. A single leftover portion, sliced and offered on thin toast spread with mayonnaise and cut in quarters, makes fine appetizers with a glass of white wine.

Nobody, but nobody, in your family would touch mussels no matter how beautifully prepared? Peasants! But sometimes even the best of cooks must face realities of family life. If, instead of mussels, your family will at least try fish, perhaps you can tempt them with **Halibut in Herb Sauce**.

1/2 C. olive oil	2 t. salt
2 T. lemon juice	dash of black pepper
2 sprigs fresh thyme (or 1/4 t. dry thyme)	1 mashed garlic clove
	2 lbs. halibut

In a small bowl, combine sauce ingredients. Arrange two pounds of halibut steaks in a single layer in a shallow foil-lined baking pan. Pour herb sauce over fish and let stand for half-an-hour, turning once in marinade. Preheat oven to 375°. Bake fish 20 to 25 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Enough for six.

What do you mean, "They won't eat fish at all." What's the matter with them?

Well, of course, if they won't, they won't. You can't force them. There's absolutely no point in buying a lovely piece of fish and going to all the trouble of cooking it, if the whole tableful of family members stands up and walks away en masse when a piscatorial platter arrives from the kitchen.

So what do you do instead? Aunt Olivia might have served an omelet, but **Zucchini Quiche** is one option to offer those who decline to eat fish.

4 eggs beaten	1 med. onion, chopped
1 C. Bisquick	3 med. zucchini, shredded
1/2 C. salad oil	1 1/2 C. shredded Cheddar cheese
2 t. chopped parsley	salt and pepper to suit

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease a 10" pie pan. In a large bowl, combine all ingredients in order given and stir together until just mixed. Pour into pie pan and bake 45 minutes. Cut into six pieces. Caesar salad or tossed greens with oil and vinegar dressing complements Zucchini Quiche as readily as mussels...steamed plain, steamed in wine, or devilled and baked. And, however you view it, it's a nice change from clam chowder.

Bon Appetit.