

Mussels are found in all the oceans of the world and have been a favorite seafood of many peoples for centuries. This has not been the case in the U. S. until recently—except for families from some ethnic backgrounds, those with traditions of choice recipes from the old country.

The mussel is a member of the clam family and is somewhat similar in appearance—except for the coloring—to the soft-shell clam. The mussel's outer shell is generally blue-black and somewhat elongated in shape.

The bay mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) is the best known of several mussels that inhabit protected tidal beaches along the Oregon coast. The California mussel (*Mytilus californianus*), found along the outer coast, is another common mussel.

Mussel meat has a delicate flavor, and many who enjoy clams or oysters find mussels to be equally delicious. You can substitute mussels in most recipes calling for clams and oysters.

Mussels are an excellent source of protein, vitamins, and minerals. They can be steamed, fried, baked, breaded, stewed—in other words, mussels can be prepared in every imaginable way and served as a main dish or in a wide variety of side dishes.

Like other shellfish, fresh mussels are a perishable product; use them as soon as possible after you buy or harvest them. Do not keep mussels at home several days before you eat them.

To store mussels for a short time, place in an open container and reduce the holding temperature to as near 32°F (0°C) as possible.

The entire meat is edible except for the byssus, an easily seen clump of black, threadlike material that you can pull out of the mussel with pliers or your fingers before cooking or easily remove after cooking. (The byssus threads are the mussel's “holdfast” to rocks and ledges.)

Be sure mussels are free of sand or grit before cooking. Pile them in the sink under cold running water and scrub with a stiff brush. Discard any mussels that remain open or are heavy with sand. Occasionally, wild mussels contain “pearls,” so chew with caution.

This publication is adapted, with permission, from Mussels and Maine Seafood Cooking, both publications of the Maine Department of Marine Resources. It was reviewed for use in the Pacific Northwest by staff in the Department of Nutrition and Food Management at Oregon State University.

Harvesting wild mussels

When you gather mussels along the shore, make sure the area where you plan to harvest is not under restrictions of any kind.

Public health advisories

Your state department of health or agriculture monitors the safety of the harvesting area. In Oregon, the Department of Agriculture maintains a recreational shellfish hotline that reports on the safety of harvesting areas. Call (503) 986-4728 for shellfish news. (In summer-time, mussels' capacity to filter small particles makes them accumulators of the deadly red tide organism, *Gonyaulax*.)

Pick mussels from ledges or rocks, preferably at low tide. Avoid those that have been exposed for long periods of time to sunlight and air.

Food safety

Some of the recipes in this brochure direct you to boil or steam the mussels until the shells open. In addition, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends the following. *Boiled*—Shells will open during boiling. After shells open, boiling should continue for 3 to 5 minutes. *Steamed*—Cook 4 to 9 minutes from the start of steaming.

Remember: Mussels are not good keepers—keep them refrigerated until you use them. Use them quickly! And, of course, refrigerate leftovers promptly.

Harvest regulations

Department of Fish and Wildlife regulations can change from year to year. Be sure to check current regulations, especially about licenses (not required in recent years), special regulations (for example, regarding marine gardens, preserves, and research areas), and daily bag limits. Regulation booklets are available at most sporting goods outlets. For information in Oregon, contact the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife—Newport (541) 867-4741; Charleston (541) 888-5515; Astoria (503) 325-2462.

BBQ Mussels

Servings: 4 as an appetizer

24 cooked mussels, in the shells
8 tsp. your favorite BBQ sauce

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Debeard mussels completely. Take mussels out of the shells. Put back on half shell and top with your favorite BBQ sauce, about 1/3 tsp. per mussel. Bake 5–10 minutes; serve as appetizer.

Crunchy Vegetable and Mussel Salad

Servings: 3

2 quarts of mussels, cooked (approximately 3 lbs.)
4 sticks celery, diced
2 onions, diced
1 red apple, cored and diced
3 Tbsp. low cal. mayonnaise
Salt and pepper to taste

Steam mussels until shells gape open; discard ones that do not open. Chill or cool mussels. Combine mussel meat, celery, onions, apple, light mayonnaise, and salt and pepper. Allow to chill for 1/2 hour or more.

Mussels in Wine

Servings: 4

3 quarts mussels in shells
2 cups dry white wine
4 onions, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, crushed
1/2 tsp. dried thyme
1 1/2 Tbsp. flour
Pepper to taste
1 1/2 tsp. chopped parsley



Rinse mussels under cold running water; remove beards around edges. In a large pan, place cleaned mussels, white wine, chopped onion, crushed garlic, and thyme. Cover and bring to a boil. Boil gently for 4–6 minutes or until mussels open. Drain, reserving liquid. Cover mussels to keep them warm. In a saucepan, boil reserved liquid until reduced by half; cool. Stir Wondra flour into cool liquid, return to heat, and stir until boiling and thickened. Season to taste with pepper and parsley. Simmer on gentle heat for 2 minutes. Arrange warm mussels in serving bowls and spoon sauce over tops.

Mussels with Linguini

Servings: 8

4 lbs. mussels in the shell
2 onions, thinly sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. olive oil
2 lemons, juice of
2 large cans (1 lb. 13 oz.) Italian tomatoes, mashed
1 can (6 oz.) tomato paste, low sodium
1 tsp. basil
1 Tbsp. oregano
2 cups red wine
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. black pepper
2 lbs. linguini

Rinse and debeard mussels. Sauté onion and garlic in oil (1 tsp.) in large kettle. When onion is golden and soft, add lemon juice, tomatoes, tomato paste, basil, oregano, red wine, salt, and pepper. Simmer over low heat for 15 minutes with the pot covered and 15–20 minutes without the cover, until sauce thickens. Add mussels to sauce, cover, and cook over medium-high heat until the mussels open, approximately 5 minutes. Cook linguini according to directions on the package and toss with 1 tsp. olive oil to prevent sticking. Arrange linguini in a large platter and cover with cooked mussels and tomato sauce. Serve immediately.

Steamed Mussels

Servings: 6 as an appetizer; 2 as entrée

48 mussels in shells (2 dozen mussels per lb.)

1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped

1/2 cup onion, chopped

4 cloves garlic, minced

2 tsp. oregano

2 tsp. basil

1 cup white wine

Debeard mussels. Place parsley, onion, garlic, oregano, basil, and wine in a large saucepan. Add mussels. Cover with a tight lid and steam on medium heat for approximately 10 minutes or until shells open. Agitate the pan during this time to cook the mussels evenly.

Maine Mussel Chowder

Servings: 12

6 qt. small mussels in shells (approx. 200)

6 oz. salt pork, finely diced or ground

2 large onions, diced

2 Tbsp. flour

1 lb. (5 or 6) potatoes, diced (1/2 in.)

1 qt. milk, hot—**do not boil**

1/2 pt. of light cream, hot—**do not boil**

Salt

White pepper

- 1 Sort and scrub mussels. Trim byssus. Blanch the mussels in 6-qt. kettle to open shells. Remove the mussel meat with a sharp knife. Set mussels aside.
- 2 Drain mussel broth into a 1-qt measuring cup by pouring carefully from top so that the sediments will remain in the kettle. Rinse the kettle under hot water. Add enough hot water to the mussel broth to make 4 cups total volume.
- 3 Put the diced pork in the 6-qt. kettle, and cook until partially rendered. **Do not brown.** Add onions; sauté until transparent. **Do not brown.** Add the flour and stir to blend thoroughly with the fat. Add the mussel broth, stir until smooth, and bring to a boil. Add diced potatoes and boil slowly until potatoes are done (8 to 10 minutes).

4. Add the mussels, hot milk, and cream.
5. Season carefully with salt and white pepper.
6. Serve with pilot, saltine, or soup crackers. Makes 12 8-oz servings.

Baked Mussels

60 mussels

Salt and pepper

1 tsp. chopped onion

Sliced bacon

Cheese

Prepare mussels and blanch to open. Remove from shells and place in buttered baking dish. Season with salt, pepper, and onion. Cover with thin slices of bacon and cheese. Bake in moderate oven (350°F) for 15 minutes or until cheese is slightly melted.

Mussel Broth

Steam 3 lb. of cleaned mussels in 1 cup water in which there is a small amount of onion, celery, and parsley. Season the liquid with salt, pepper, and butter. Serve hot.

Mussel Bisque

Add an equal amount of milk to mussel broth. Thicken this, using 1 1/2 teaspoons of flour to each cup of liquid. Boil up. Serve this with or without the addition of chopped mussels.

Fried Mussels

5 1/2 doz. mussel meats

4 eggs, beaten

3 to 4 cups soft bread crumbs

vegetable oil for deep frying

Parsley

2 lemons, quartered

Cocktail sauce

Tartar sauce

1. Sort and scrub mussels. Trim byssus. Blanch mussels in 6-qt. kettle to open shells. Remove mussel meat with a sharp knife.
2. Dip mussels in beaten egg and then in bread crumbs. Shake off excess crumbs.
3. Fry in deep fat at 375°F until golden brown. Drain on absorbent paper and serve on a hot serving platter. Garnish with parsley and lemon quarters.
4. Serve cocktail sauce and tartar sauce on the side.

Mussels in Herb Butter

Servings: 4

2 doz. mussels

1/2 cup softened butter

1 Tbsp. chopped parsley

1 Tbsp. lemon juice

1 shallot

3 large cloves garlic, pureed

1 slice raw bacon, minced

Salt and pepper

Steam well-scrubbed and bearded mussels in the usual manner until they open. (You can use frozen mussels, if they are available.) Save half a shell for each mussel. Blend the remaining ingredients thoroughly. Put a small amount of herb butter in each shell. Lay a mussel on it. Cover with more butter and place in single layer in shallow pans (pie tins). Heat oven to 400°F and bake for 15 to 20 minutes. Serve on cocktail plates with seafood forks or on a tray with toothpicks. They should be sizzling!

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OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Oregon's Tasty Mussels



Recipes

Handling &

Harvesting Tips

