

# Appetite for Knowledge



## BRINGING HOME BIVALVES – CLAMS, MUSSELS, AND OYSTERS!

If you think clam, mussel, and oyster cookery seem best left to the experts, then think again!

In reality, most of the prep work comes down to choosing exceptionally fresh shellfish. If you have not cooked shellfish at home, it can be intimidating the first time. However, once you get over that hump, you will be doing it all the time. With that in mind, I have researched crucial expert advice and guidelines for the bivalve.

### NUTRITION

The nutritional value of bivalves can vary widely based on the type, but they are generally low in calories and high in important nutrients like zinc, vitamin B12, manganese, and selenium.

### BUYING BIVALVES

Bivalves should be purchased alive, since they decompose extremely quickly once dead, even when properly stored on ice and refrigerated. Most of the qualities listed below indicate whether or not the species inside the shell is still living.

Like all seafood, they should smell of the ocean or sea and not “fishy” in any way. In their raw state,

bivalves should feel heavy for their size. Shells should be tightly closed or just slightly opened, with no chips or cracks present. If they’re open and you tap them, they should close. If they don’t close, they’re not alive. Do not buy them.

### PREPPING

Once ready to prep or eat raw, sharply tap any that are slightly ajar; if alive, shells should close and if any don’t, make sure to discard. Likewise, once cooked, the shells should open up slightly, this indicates that the shellfish was alive when cooked; any that stay closed should be discarded.

Even though they may not look very lively, fresh shellfish are indeed alive and need to breathe. Do not smother them in a sealed plastic bag. Instead, place clams, mussels, and oysters in a bowl covered with a wet clean towel. Put a few ice cubes on the towel so that it stays damp and keep the bowl in the coldest part of the refrigerator, which is usually on the bottom, in the back. Drain off any water that accumulates in the bowl. Use bivalves within a day or two.

APRIL 5, 2018



The shells should be tightly closed when you take them out of the fridge. If you find one that's not, give it a tap; if it still doesn't close, discard it.

## CLAMS AND MUSSELS

Scrub with a stiff brush under cold running water. Soak clams in cold water for 10 minutes or so to loosen any grit, then transfer them to a colander and give them a rinse before cooking. Use a sharp paring knife to scrape off any barnacles or dirt on the mussel shells, and check for beards. If there's a hairy strand attached to the mussel, tug it out with your knife and discard.

## OYSTERS

Most recipes for oysters call for them to be "shucked." If so, scrub and rinse the oysters under cold running water.

Place the oyster, flat-side up, on a cutting board or non-slip work surface. Firmly grip the oyster with a tea towel, or wear a shucker's glove, and leave the hinged end exposed.

Place the tip of an oyster knife between the two shells, on either side of the hinge. Applying firm but gentle pressure, press inward. Twist and wiggle the knife tip with gentle pressure until the blade has made its way inside.

Continue to twist and press the knife in until the top shell pops open. Try to retain the flavorful oyster "liquor" by keeping the shell level as you shuck.

Clean any grit from your knife, and then pry the shell open by inserting the knife tip in a couple



## OYSTERS ROCKEFELLER

### Ingredients

- 3 dozen fresh oysters in the shell, washed
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup butter, cubed
- 1 package (9 ounces) fresh spinach, torn
- 1 cup grated Romano cheese
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 2 pounds kosher salt

### Preparation

1. Shuck oysters, reserving bottom shell; set aside. In a large skillet, saute onion in butter until tender. Add spinach; cook and stir until wilted. Remove from the heat; stir in the cheese, lemon juice and pepper.
2. Spread kosher salt into two ungreased 15x10x1-in. baking pans. Lightly press the oyster shells down into the salt. Place one oyster in each shell; top each with 2-1/2 teaspoons spinach mixture.
3. Bake, uncovered, at 450° until oysters are plump, 6-8 minutes. Serve immediately.

Source: <https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/oysters-rockefeller/>

of more spots, twisting it to release the shell completely. Run the knife along the inside of the upper shell to cut the muscle attaching it to the top shell.

Run the knife along the inside of the lower shell, and gently cut the oyster free. If you open an oyster that has a strong, sulfurous smell, discard it. It is dead! Leave in the half shell until ready to use, and then proceed as directed in the recipe.

## COOKING BIVALVES

The most important thing to remember about cooking bivalves is that like all protein, they firm up as they cook. If overcooked they will get rubbery. Each of them takes only 3 to 5 minutes to cook.

Mussels are a bit more delicate and are best steamed. Clams steam well too, but they can also be roasted, or grilled. Oysters can be grilled, steamed, or roasted.

Be brave and BRING HOME BIVALVES – Clams, Mussels, and Oysters!



Vicki Hayman  
University Extension Educator  
Nutrition & Food Safety, NE Area  
Newcastle, Wyoming  
307-746-3531 • [vhayman@uwyo.edu](mailto:vhayman@uwyo.edu)



*Issued in furtherance of extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Kelly Crane, director, University of Wyoming Extension, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.*

*The University's policy has been, and will continue to be, one of nondiscrimination, offering equal opportunity to all employees and applicants for employment on the basis of their demonstrated ability and competence without regard to such matters as race, sex, gender, color, religion, national origin, disability, age, veteran status, sexual orientation, genetic information, political belief, or other status protected by state and federal statutes or University Regulations.*

*Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by University of Wyoming is implied.*