

Serving Clams in Their Own Juice

The hinged shells of clams, mussels and other bivalves enclose tender, sweet flesh and a salty liquor. If the shellfish are cooked briefly in a little water or wine, their shells open and release enough liquor to serve as the basis of a soup. On the right, the liquor from clams is combined with milk, potatoes, onions, bacon—and the clams themselves—to make a chowder (*recipe, page 131*). Below, mussels and their cooking liquor are incorporated into a creamy velouté.

Bivalves should be inspected and any that have open or damaged shells must be discarded. The rest can be kept alive for up to 24 hours in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. Several hours before cooking, unwrap and place them in cold, salted water to flush out their grit.

The steaming that opens bivalves is usually sufficient to cook their flesh; longer cooking would merely toughen it. Only the rubbery necks of some clam species need extra cooking to tenderize them. The softer meat is simmered in the soup just long enough to reheat it.



1 Cleaning the clams. Soak the clams in cold, salted water for several hours. Change the water at intervals; it will become cloudy from grit expelled by the clams. Scrub the shells clean (*above*) and rinse the clams under the tap.



2 Steaming the clams. Put the clams in a large pan with about 2 cups of water. Cover with a tight-fitting lid and bring the water to a vigorous boil. Shake the pan occasionally to redistribute the clams so that they cook evenly. Remove them from the heat when they have opened—after about 10 minutes. Discard any clams that remain closed.

Using Mussel Liquor in a Velouté

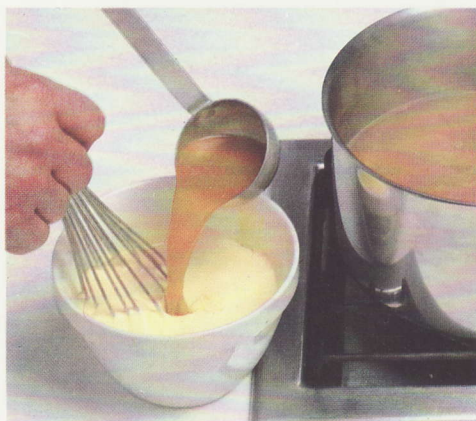
The simplest mussel soup is made by steaming the bivalves with wine, herbs and aromatic vegetables. The liquor released by the mussels merges with these flavourings to become a fragrant broth.



1 Steaming the mussels. Soak and scrub the mussels as for clams (*Step 1, top*), pull free their beards, then steam them until they open—about 5 minutes. Drain the broth (*above*) and strain it through muslin (*Step 3, top*). Shell the mussels.

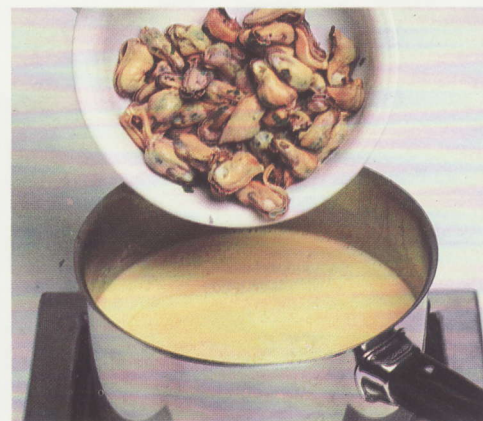
This dish, in which the unshelled mussels are served in the broth, is known as *moules à la marinière*.

For a richer soup, demonstrated here, the mussel broth is combined with a



2 Preparing the soup. Add the liquid to a roux-thickened fish broth cooked over a low heat. Bring slowly to the boil and skim. Add a little saffron, dissolved in hot water. Whisk egg yolks with cream; dilute them with a little warm soup.

velouté sauce and thickened with egg yolks and cream to make a classic velouté soup (*page 28; recipe, page 132*). The shelled mussels are added to the soup at the last moment.



3 Adding the mussels. Remove the soup from the heat and stir in the egg and cream mixture. Return the soup to a low heat and add the shelled mussels. Cook the soup for a minute longer, but do not let it simmer, lest the egg yolks curdle.