

## SUMMARY

Always purchase live shellfish from a reputable dealer.

Be sure to keep live shellfish cold and moist from point of purchase until consumption for best quality.

Consuming raw meat products such as shellfish has unique risks. Be certain to keep them cold and cook shellfish if you are at increased health risk (such as immunocompromised).

For more information visit:

[www.capecodextension.org/shellfish](http://www.capecodextension.org/shellfish)



**Sea Grant**



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*Safe Seafood Series*

# TIPS FOR FRESH & TASTY SHELLFISH

Handling,  
Storage,  
and Cooking



**Simple recommendations  
to make fresh,  
Massachusetts shellfish a  
healthy part of any diet!**

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Purchase shellfish from a reputable dealer; the shellfish should be kept cold while in display or storage for sale at the dealer.

Molluscan shellfish, like clams, oysters, or mussels are usually sold live, if one of your senses suggest otherwise and they look or smell dead - avoid them.

Shellfish may open slightly or gape in storage but they should close when tapped or jostled. If they do not close, or have broken shells they are likely dead and should be discarded. Note: some shellfish like soft shell clams or razor clams never completely close their shell, but still normally clamp their shells.

The harvest and sale of shellfish is heavily regulated and uses a tagging system to trace shellfish back to the source. If you ever have questions about the source, you can ask to see the tags.



## ELSA'S MUSSELS (IN A CREAMY DIJON SAUCE)

- 3-4 dozen mussels, debearded and scrubbed
- 1-1/2 cups white wine or dry white French Vermouth
- 2 Tbsp flour
- 5 Tbsp unsalted butter, softened
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 4 Tbsp onion, chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 3/4 cup heavy cream
- 4 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- 2 egg yolks, lightly beaten



In a small bowl blend flour and 3 Tbsp butter together with a fork until smooth. Melt remaining 2 Tbsp butter over medium high heat in a heavy-bottom sauté pan with lid that fits tightly. Add garlic, onion, and bay leaf and cook, stirring for a few minutes. Add white wine and bring to a boil. Add mussels, cover and cook until shells open. Check after about 5 minutes. Remove mussels from liquid with slotted spoon and place in a bowl. Bring liquid to a boil then take off heat. Quickly add the flour and butter mixture and put back on the heat; whisking constantly. Bring mixture to a boil until it thickens. Cook for another minute or two to cook out the raw taste of the flour. Reduce heat to low. Add cream, mustard, and egg yolks. Heat to warm, stirring constantly. Don't bring back to a boil, or the eggs might curdle. Pour sauce over mussels.

## EASY OYSTER STEW

- 2 Tbsp butter (bacon drippings work well also)
- 3 green onions, chopped
- 14 oz shucked oysters, with the liquor (12-18 depending on size)
- 24 oz whole milk
- 1 Tsp black pepper (or Cayenne for more spice)
- 1-2 Tbsp fresh tarragon, chopped (or try other herbs of your choice)

Melt butter and briefly tenderize the green onions. Add the rest of the ingredients and heat slowly over a low to medium heat until the edges of the oysters begin to curl (do not boil the stew). For a heartier stew start with bacon drippings instead of butter.

## COOKING & RECIPES

Shellfish are considered fully cooked when the internal temperature reaches 145°F for 15 seconds. Size will make a difference but the FDA suggests these cooking times for a fully cooked product.

- Steaming, 4-9 minutes after steaming starts
- Boiling, 3-5 minutes after shells open
- Baking, 10 minutes at 450°F
- Shucked meats should be boiled or fried (at 375°F) for 3 minutes



### GARLICKY GRILLED LITTLENECKS

- 2-4 dozen littleneck clams
- ½ stick butter
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup white wine
- 3 cloves minced garlic
- 2 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- ½ Tsp ground oregano

Preheat a gas grill, one side of the grill on high, the other on low. Rinse the clams, then place on the high heat side of the grill. On the low heat side of the grill melt the butter in an aluminum pan then add the remaining ingredients. Close the grill cover and check every few minutes for clams that have opened. Carefully remove the opened clams to reserve the juices in the shell, and place in the aluminum pan on the other side of the grill to mix with the sauce. Serve with bread.



### RAW SHELLFISH

Consuming raw shellfish allows for a unique opportunity to taste the shellfish exactly how they were shaped by the growing environment. However, raw shellfish also come with unique risks, in that naturally occurring marine bacteria, such as *Vibrio* may occur in shellfish which at high doses can cause gastro-intestinal illness. At temperatures below 50°F the bacteria will not grow so risk is controlled by the harvesters and dealers by keeping shellfish cold from harvest to sale. Similarly, shellfish purchasers should keep shellfish cold after purchase for the safest, freshest shellfish eating experience. Warmer water temperatures are generally associated with greater potential *Vibrio* occurrence so keeping shellfish cool in the summer is especially important.

**Note: certain individuals are at higher risk of illness from raw or partially cooked shellfish.** Pregnant women, young children, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems or decreased stomach acidity should avoid consuming raw shellfish. Cooked shellfish are still safe for these individuals.

## HANDLING

- **Be prepared** when purchasing shellfish, bring a cooler or bag with ice or an ice pack to keep them cool while taking them home. The dealer may also be able to provide ice.
- Shellfish should be rinsed or washed to remove dirt or shell debris, but do not store them in water.
- Prevent cross-contamination: handle and store raw shellfish separate from other foods.



**Be Prepared!**

## STORAGE

- Live shellfish should be kept refrigerated at **less than 50°F**, to prevent spoilage and bacterial growth.
- Placing a moist towel over the shellfish also helps keep them moist and fresh in the refrigerator, just avoid storing them in water.
- Do not store live shellfish in a sealed container, and do not freeze live shellfish as this will kill them.



**Keep Shellfish Cold!**

## SHUCKING

Shucking or opening an oyster or clam can be intimidating, but with a little practice and patience it becomes easier. When working with knives safety is key, make sure to protect your hands and use an appropriate knife. Use a towel or glove to protect the hand used to hold the shellfish.

### OYSTERS

- The most common method for opening is through the hinge
- Place oyster cup (deep) side down
- Insert knife in hinge between 2 shells
- Twist slightly to get separation
- Use care not to exert too much pressure
- As shells open slide knife inside against upper shell to cut muscle attachment
- Remove/discard upper flat shell
- Cut remaining muscle attachment in cup half of shell to free the oyster



### QUAHOGS

- Usually requires a thinner knife with one sharp edge
- Relaxed clams open more easily so keeping clams cold or on ice can help
- Insert the sharp edge of the knife between the shells opposite the hinge (from the hinge can also work)
- Apply pressure to slowly push the knife between both shells
- As the shells open use the knife to cut the 2 muscles on either side to open the clam
- Slice the muscles close to the shell attachment to release the meat from the shell



## SAFE STORAGE TIMES IN REFRIGERATOR

### Live Shellfish

- Oysters, use within a week
- Quahogs, use within a week
- Mussels, 2-3 days
- Soft-shell & razor clams, 1-2 days
- Scallop meats, 2-3 days

### Freshly Shucked: Oysters or Clams

- Refrigerated, sealed container, 5-7 days
- Frozen, up to 3 months