

## **Oysters: A Seafood Delicacy and Culinary Tradition**

It's a mystery as to when people first began eating oysters. Most likely, they witnessed an animal such as an otter happily opening and eating, what at first glance, looked like a rock.

Whatever the origins, people have valued oysters as a food source since recorded history. Particularly prized by early Greek and Roman cultures, oysters are exceptionally nutrient-rich foods that contain protein and carbohydrates.

George Baxevanis, owner of Fisherman's Quarters II in Asheville, NC, emphasized the health benefits of eating oysters – "Oysters are a great source of vitamins A, B [1,2 and 3] and C. Eating half a dozen of oysters gives you a daily dose of many essential minerals as well including calcium, copper, iodine, iron, magnesium and zinc. They are also believed to be powerful aphrodisiacs."

### **Oyster Varieties**

Like wine lovers, oyster aficionados have developed their own culture. The particular region an oyster is cultivated from or farmed in imparts flavor distinctions on the oyster. Differences in the water quality, its' nutrient composition and sediments found in the oysters' environment give them different tastes so the region or "terrior" the oysters come from is of importance to oyster fanatics. Oysters, therefore, are often named by the place from which they come. That said, oysters are usually divided into three types: flat or European, Pacific, and Virginica which are also called the Atlantic or Eastern oyster. Pacific and Virginica are the most common oysters found on menus in the states.

Atlantic oysters are found from Canada to South America and are renowned for their delicate flavor. Apalachicola oysters, from Florida, are most-commonly served on the east coast and are among those used at Baxevanis' family-style restaurant. Other common Atlantic oysters include the Box and Blue Point varieties from Long Island, NY.

Pacific oysters are often larger and have rougher shells, allowing them to thrive in colder Pacific waters. Pacific oysters have a creamier taste that is more mineral than salty. Kumamoto oysters are a popular example. They have a buttery finish and are a good "beginner's oyster" because of their small size and mild taste. Steamboat oysters are another popular Pacific variety.

### **The Art of Oyster Shucking**

Oyster shells are tough to open and the skill of opening an oyster known as "shucking" is an art form. This skill only comes into play if you want to enjoy oysters raw or "on the half shell" as cooking oysters will cause them to open naturally. If a cooked oyster does not open throw it away, as it is most likely spoiled.

To open oysters for raw consumption you need an oyster knife and an oyster glove. Oyster knives have a blunt tip and usually a slight curve before the tip. Never use a sharp tip knife to open an oyster as they easily slip or break and can cause you to injure yourself. This is where gloves come in handy. Shuckers often wear a glove that is similar to chain armor.

Now, hold the oyster with the curved side down and hinge pointed toward you. Insert the knife near the hinge between the two shell halves. Rock the knife slightly side to side as you push in. Work the tip of the knife into the oyster about half an inch. Twist the knife handle to pop the oyster open. Next, slice the tissue that connects the oyster to the top shell. After opening the top shell, cut the oyster from bottom cup. Try not to mangle the oyster and flip it over in the curved half of the shell to make it look nice.

### **Calabash Seafood, Asheville style**

Calabash seafood is popular, worldwide, for its' generous portions and easy going home-style feel. Originating from a small fishing village on the Carolina coast, George Baxevanis has brought Calabash to Asheville at Fishermans' Quarters II. "We serve oysters your favorite ways. The oyster stew is very popular. We also have an oyster cocktail which is our spin on raw oysters. As a Calabash restaurant we also serve them fried as an entrée, a po-boy or as part of one of our combination platters."

However you like your oysters, eat up and enjoy!

Visit: [www.FishermansQuarters.info](http://www.FishermansQuarters.info).