

## **Oyster Stew and New England Clam Chowder Beat the Winter Blues**

2010 has delivered snow to 49 states, so it's safe to assume that most of us could use something warm and tasty in our bellies! Now, often, when people think of seafood, they think of long hot summer days, but the colder weather is also the perfect time to cozy up with a bowl of oyster stew or a steamy cup of creamy New England Clam Chowder. There's nothing quite like the taste of the sea on a chilly winter's day.

"I live in the mountains of western North Carolina," says Mark Ferrell, an Asheville, NC resident, "and not only is snow a challenge, but getting fresh seafood is even a greater one. When I get a craving for a taste of the sea, I head over to Fisherman's Quarters II, a family seafood restaurant in West Asheville; it's the perfect place to warm up with some hearty fish stews and chowders."

### **Oyster Stew**

The joy of eating oysters has been celebrated seafood lovers, the world over – almost since time began! For instance the Britons had plentiful oyster beds as early as 55 B.C. And, when the Romans invaded Britain, they became so captivated by the exquisite flavor of the oyster that they began shipping them back to Rome in bags of snow and ice. The French, Greeks, Danes, Irish and American Indians were also among others who feasted on oysters many centuries ago.

Throughout their history, oysters have been prepared in many ways ranging from raw or roasted to plain or seasoned. A popular dish that has evolved over the years is oyster stew – elegant and satisfying.

### **Shopping for Oysters**

When shopping for oysters, George Baxevanis, owner of Fisherman's Quarters II in Asheville, NC has some advice.

"Never buy one that has even a slightly gaping shell," he says. "They are alive and fresh only when their shells are tightly closed."

If you are planning to make your own oyster stew, you have some choices when it comes to buying oysters. You can either buy them in their own shells, or already shucked and in their own liquor by the pint or quart. If the oysters have been opened by your fish store, you must use them immediately.

Since oyster stew is a popular dish, you will find many recipes online. Simply Google "recipes for oyster stew" or better yet, head out to your local seafood restaurant and try some of theirs.

## **New England Clam Chowder**

A steaming bowl of New England Clam Chowder, with a sprinkling of oyster crackers, can make a satisfying and pleasant one-meal dish.

## **Shopping for Clams**

Baxevanis explains that you can buy clams in their shells by the dozen, or shucked by the pint or quart.

“If you buy them in their shells, they can be sandy, so make sure that when you open and clean them that you wash them very well,” he says. “Nothing can destroy the pleasure of eating clams quicker than a few grains of sand.”

The most familiar clams on the East Coast are either soft or hard. Soft clams are the ones with the long hose-like neck. They are also called “steamers.” The soft clam is ideally suited for steaming, but it’s also good for any recipe that calls for chopped clams, and many people prefer soft clams to hard for making chowder.

New Englanders will insist that there is no better clam, except perhaps the quahog – the Indian name for hard clam. You will buy hard clams under three different names, depending on their size. The largest hard clam is called a chowder clam; the medium size is a cherrystone; and the smallest is the littleneck.

Since these hard clams are so adaptable, you can use them however you choose to in just about any recipe.

On the Pacific coast, there is a much greater variety – the two most well known are the famous Pismo and razor clams. Occasionally these will turn up in East coast restaurants and fish stores, but not often.

Again, check out some recipes online or visit your local seafood restaurant for no muss; no fuss!