

Florida Food Fare

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Clams

Description: American Indians used the purple lining from clamshells to make wampum (beads strung in strands, belts, or sashes and used for barter, ornamental, ceremonial and spiritual purposes) The term clam is generally applied to a wide variety of bivalve (two-shelled) mollusks. The two main varieties are hard shell and soft shell. There are two commercially important species of hard shell clams harvested in Florida, the southern quahog (*Mercenaria campechiensis*) and the northern quahog (*Mercenaria mercenaria*). These brown nearly- oval shaped mollusks come in three sizes. The smallest are Littleneck clams, which are the tenderest and sweetest and have a shell diameter of less than 2 inches. The medium sized, Cherrystone Clam, is about 2 1/2 inches across. The largest is the Chowder clam, which has a shell diameter of at least 3 inches. The hard shell protects the creamy beige, slightly salty meat inside. The rings or ridges on the outside of the shell indicate the clams growth and age which can be more than 30 years. The most common East coast soft shell is the Steamer clam, which has an off white thin brittle, shell that doesn't close entirely due to the long siphon extending from the body. They can reach sizes of 6 inches but are usually found at half that size.

Availability: Hard clams are caught wild from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Florida, Texas, Cuba and Mexico. They are also harvested in five East and West Coast counties in Florida where they are farm raised. In 2005 there were over 400 certified hard clam growers in Florida. The Florida hard clam industry was struck hard by the 2004 hurricane season. It was estimated that at least 50 percent of the planted clams in Florida were lost due to the hurricanes. The industry is slowly recovering and Florida produces more hard clams by volume than any other state with about 80% of that production from Florida's West

Coast. Live clams should only be taken from "approved" coastal waters. A continuous coastal water monitoring and approval program is conducted by the Florida Department of Natural Resources, which also regulates the size and number of clams harvested. Clams can be found in sand or mud close to shore and in bays just below the surface of the bottom and are harvested by hand tools, such as rakes, shovels or tongs. Off shore, dredges are most commonly used. Clams are available year round, with February and December being the months of greatest supply.

Nutritional Value: Clams are high in protein and virtually fat free and are perhaps the most versatile seafood in the world. One pound of clams with shell, after shell is removed is about 68g, which yields 50 calories, 8.6 g protein, 31 mg calcium, 213 mg potassium and 9.5 g iron. It also contains 10.8 mcg folate, 33.6 mcg vitamin B-6, 204 IU vitamin A and 23 mg cholesterol.

Selection and Care: Clams are sold live in the shell, fresh or frozen shucked, and canned. When buying hard shell clams in the shell, make sure the shells are tightly closed. If a shell is slightly open, tap it lightly. If it doesn't snap shut, the clam is dead and should be discarded. To test a soft shell clam, lightly touch its neck, if it moves, it's alive. The guideline for buying shucked clams is plumpness and clear liquid. All raw shellfish must be stored in refrigeration to slow or minimize bacterial growth. Direct storage in ice is not recommended as it may kill the shellfish. Store live clams up to 2 weeks in a 40 Degrees F. refrigerator in containers with the lid slightly open. Refrigerate shucked clams up to 7 days in a sealed container. Clams can be frozen in the shell and kept up to 3 months. Place the live clams in moisture-vapor resistant bags. Press out excess air and freeze. To freeze the clam meat, shuck the clams, then clean and wash the meat thoroughly. Drain and pack in freezer containers, leaving 1/2 inch head space. Frozen shellfish should be thawed in the refrigerator.

Preparation and Use: Clams may be prepared in a variety of ways including steaming, frying and baking. They are a favorite in chowders, soups, appetizers and casseroles. Properly cooked seafood is considerably safer than raw seafood and everyone should be aware of the potential dangers of eating seafood raw. People with liver disorders or weakened immune systems should not eat clams or other seafood unless it has been thoroughly cooked. To clean clams: scrub the outside of each clam with a bristle brush. Cover the clams with cold water and add about 1/4 cup of cornmeal and 1/8 cup of salt to each quart of clams. Let stand 2 or 3 hours (this also lightens the meat color). Wash, then cover the clams with cold water for 5 minutes. A knife may be used to cut both of the abductor muscles and remove the clam meat.

Recipes:

Clams Casino

24 each Cherrystone clams	6 tablespoons seasoned bread crumbs
6 tablespoons butter	1 lemon
1 garlic clove, minced	parmesean cheese
4 tablespoons green pepper, chopped	

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. Open clams and discard top shell. Place clams in shallow baking pan. In saucepan melt half the butter and saute garlic and green pepper 2-3 minutes. Add remaining butter and bread crumbs. Place about 1 teaspoon of the mixture on top of each clam. Sprinkle with lemon juice and parmesan cheese. Bake for 10 minutes.

Clam Chowder

3 slices bacon cut into 1/2 inch pieces	2 cups diced fresh clams
1 medium onion, chopped	16 ounces low fat evaporated milk
2 stalks celery, diced	salt and pepper to taste
4 potatoes diced	

Fry bacon until lightly brown, remove from pan. Sauté onions in bacon fat until tender. Place the chopped celery in a 2-quart saucepan, add enough water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add potatoes, bacon and onions along with some of the remaining bacon fat. If needed, add more water to barely cover the vegetables. Cover and simmer 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Season to taste with salt and pepper, Add clams and evaporated milk. Heat through, stirring occasionally. Serve with a dash of Worcestershire sauce in each bowl if desired Serves 6.

Shellfish Grill

40 clams	1/3 cup butter melted
20 medium sized oysters	

Scrub clams and oysters. Place melted butter in pan on outer edge of grill to keep warm. Set clams and oysters on the grill 4 to 6 inches above a solid bed of glowing coals. After about 4 minutes or when clams and oysters begin to open, turn them over and continue to cook until they pop wide open (3-4 minutes). Hold clams and oysters over butter to drain juices into butter. Pluck out meat with a fork, dip into butter and enjoy.

Pasta and Clam Sauce

1 medium onion chopped	1 tablespoon fresh parsley chopped
1 clove garlic minced	1 teaspoon sugar

2 tablespoons olive oil
13 ounces minced clams and juice
6 ounce can tomato paste
1 cup water
2 tablespoons lemon juice

1/4 teaspoon rosemary
1/4 teaspoon ground thyme
8 ounces linguine or other pasta
parmesan cheese

Sauté the onion and garlic in oil in medium skillet. Add the clams in their juice, the tomato paste, water, lemon juice, parsley, sugar, rosemary and thyme. Simmer uncovered 15-20 minutes. Cook pasta according to package directions. Serve sauce over hot pasta, sprinkle with parmesan cheese. Serves 4