

The Opulent Oyster



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They look like crusty barnacles of the sea in their native state—rugged and quite unlovely. Once opened, the sight of the raw, shapeless animal may chill the palate of the uninitiated. But when combined with other ingredients, a savory stuffing, a spinach mixture, or rich cream for a stew, even the most prosaic of tastes will be unable to resist them.

Today oysters are more popular than ever, and the old superstition of eating them only in the "R" months has long been disproven. The adage, "never eat oysters in months without the letter 'R' in the spelling," was based partly upon difficulties associated with keeping the savory mollusks from spoiling during warmer weather (May through August) before efficient refrigeration methods were developed. Actually, oysters are good to eat all year long. After spawning, however, they may become thin and less flavorful.

Oysters have been pleasing and nourishing mankind for centuries. Coastal American Indians enjoyed them in large quantities as evidenced by great piles of oyster shells found along the shorelines by early settlers. Oysters were considered a delicacy in colonial times and are even more renowned today. These succulent gems from bays and estuaries provide a rich supply of valuable protein and minerals necessary for good health. They are also low in fat and calories and are easily digested. A 3-ounce serving of raw oysters provides a generous 8 grams of protein, yet only 72 calories!

Oysters are available to the consumer in several forms:

Live, in the shell—In this form, oysters are available by the dozen or bushel. Make sure the shells are closed tightly; this indicates the animals are alive. Plan to serve at least six oysters in-the-shell per person.

Shucked, fresh or frozen—Look for plump, natural cream-colored meat and clear liquor. No shell pieces should be present. Fresh oysters are packed by the pint, quart or gallon in metal, glass or waxed containers. Depending on the size of the oysters, a gallon will contain 160 to 400 oysters.

Along the Gulf Coast, the spawning season of the oyster is from March until November. A female may produce from 15 to 114 million eggs at one spawning, or several hundred million eggs in one summer. Oysters reach market size—three inches across the shell—in two to three years. By drawing water through the gills, this vegetarian mollusk feeds on one-celled plants called diatoms.

The open season for harvesting oysters in Texas is November 1 through April 30, except in that part

of the Laguna Madre south of the Port Mansfield Channel near the tip of Texas, where there is no closed season.

Oysters are at peak quality in winter and early spring, but fresh oysters are good to eat whenever they are available. Versatile oysters may be enjoyed in many ways: raw on the half-shell, as appetizers; fried, baked, broiled, creamed or roasted; or in stuffings, casseroles and chowders. It is important to never overcook oysters. They are naturally tender and require only a few minutes cooking time, should you prefer to cook them at all.

All that is necessary to serve oysters attractively is a small investment in rock salt and oyster shells. The rock salt, poured into a dish, stabilizes and insulates the shells. The shells, of course, hold and accent the delicately seasoned morsels of goodness. Serve the raw meat with a spicy red sauce, cover with cheese and hot sauce and bake, or try something a little more elegant.



Oysters Casino

This unique oyster recipe is destined to become one of your most popular hors d'oeuvres.

<i>1 pint fresh oysters</i>	<i>1/3 cup seasoned, toasted bread crumbs</i>
<i>1 cup frozen chopped spinach, thawed</i>	<i>18 1-inch squares of uncooked bacon</i>
<i>1/2 cup grated Romano cheese</i>	<i>18 oyster shells</i>

Arrange oyster shells in shallow, oven-proof serving dish. Squeeze excess liquid from spinach. Place one tablespoon of spinach inside each oyster shell. Top each bed of spinach with one large or two small oysters. Portion cheese evenly over oysters. Sprinkle with bread crumbs. Top each with a square off bacon. Broil for 3 to 4 minutes or until bacon is done. Serve hot. Makes 18 hors d'oeuvres.

Oysters Rockefeller

Named after John D. Rockefeller by Antoine's Restaurant in New Orleans, this 1899 recipe features oysters with elegance.

<i>1 pint large fresh oysters (approximately 18)</i>	<i>2 teaspoons anisette (optional)</i>
<i>¼ cup margarine or butter</i>	<i>¼ teaspoon salt</i>
<i>¼ cup chopped celery</i>	<i>Rock salt</i>
<i>¼ cup chopped green onions and tops</i>	<i>18 oyster shells or ramekins</i>
<i>2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley</i>	<i>¼ cup dry bread crumbs</i>
<i>1 package (10 ounces) frozen, chopped spinach, thawed</i>	<i>1 tablespoon melted mar- garine or butter</i>

In a small saucepan, sauté celery, onions and parsley in margarine until tender. In blender, combine sautéed vegetables, spinach, anisette and salt. Blend until almost pureed. When necessary, stop blender and push vegetables into blades. Fill a shallow, oven-proof serving dish with rock salt. Nestle oyster shells into salt bed. (The rock salt holds shells in place and keeps oysters hot.) Place the oysters in the shells. Top each oyster with spinach mixture. Combine bread crumbs and melted margarine, then sprinkle crumb mixture over oysters. Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes. Serve immediately. Makes 6 appetizer servings of three oysters each.

Oyster Fry

This is a popular and easy way to enjoy one of the bays' most treasured flavors.

<i>1 pint fresh oysters</i>	<i>½ cup flour</i>
<i>2 eggs</i>	<i>2 cups saltine cracker crumbs</i>
<i>2 tablespoons evaporated milk</i>	<i>½ cup margarine</i>
<i>¼ teaspoon salt</i>	<i>½ cup cooking oil</i>

Drain oysters. Beat together eggs, milk and salt. Dip oysters into egg mixture, then dredge in flour. Dip into egg mixture again and roll in cracker crumbs. Let stand 5 minutes before frying. Heat margarine and oil in large frying pan or electric skillet to 365 degrees. Fry oysters 5 to 7 minutes or until lightly browned, turning once during cooking. Drain on absorbent paper. Serve with a favorite seafood sauce. Makes 6 servings.

Angels on Horseback

Savory bacon-wrapped oysters are lightly seasoned and broiled to perfection.

1 pint fresh oysters
*2 tablespoons chopped
fresh parsley*
½ teaspoon garlic salt
*10 slices bacon, cut in
thirds*
Wooden picks

Drain oysters. Place one oyster on each piece of bacon. Sprinkle with parsley and garlic salt. Wrap bacon around oyster and secure with pick. Place "angels" on broiler rack and broil for 5 to 6 minutes or until bacon is done, turning once. Edges of the oysters will begin to curl. Makes approximately 30 hors d'oeuvres.

Nutty Oyster Balls

This unique finger food can enhance any occasion. You can't eat just a few!

<i>1 pint fresh oysters</i>	<i>¼ teaspoon salt</i>
<i>¼ cup blanched, toasted slivered almonds</i>	<i>Dash nutmeg</i>
<i>1 beaten egg</i>	<i>Dash pepper</i>
<i>1 tablespoon chopped onion</i>	<i>½ cup fine bread crumbs</i>
<i>1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley</i>	<i>Oil for frying</i>
	<i>Wallace Sauce</i>

Drain oysters thoroughly. Chop oysters and almonds. Combine them with bread crumbs, egg, onion, parsley and seasonings. Mix thoroughly. Drop by tablespoonfuls into crumbs. Roll to form balls. Place in a single layer in a fry basket. Fry in hot oil, 365 degrees, for 2 to 3 minutes or until golden brown. Drain on absorbent paper. Makes approximately 30 hors d'oeuvres. **To make Wallace Sauce**, combine 1 cup mayonnaise, 1 tablespoon prepared mustard and 2 teaspoons minced onion. **NOTE:** Oyster balls may be made ahead for later use. Fry as indicated, cool and wrap in vapor-proof paper or container and freeze. To heat, place frozen balls on baking sheet and bake at 400 degrees for 12 minutes or until heated throughout.

Anne's Oyster Stew

This family favorite always demands an encore, especially from those who recognize the best.

<i>1 quart fresh oysters, undrained</i>	<i>¼ cup margarine or butter</i>
<i>1½ tablespoons flour</i>	<i>4 cups milk</i>
<i>1½ teaspoons salt</i>	<i>2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley</i>
<i>Dash Worcestershire Sauce</i>	

In a large saucepan, blend flour, salt, Worcestershire Sauce, and 2 tablespoons water to make a paste. Add oysters, oyster liquor and margarine and simmer until edges of oysters curl. In another pan, scald milk, being careful not to boil. Add to oyster mixture. Combine gently, but thoroughly. Cover remove from heat. Let stand 10 minutes before serving. Sprinkle with parsley. Portion into large serving bowls and pass the saltine crackers or sea toast. Makes 3 to 4 servings. **NOTE:** For a richer stew, substitute canned milk for whole milk. To reduce calories, use skimmed milk.

Oyster Beignets

These hot, fritter-like portions have morsels of tasty oysters inside.

<i>1 pint fresh oysters</i>	<i>1 cup milk</i>
<i>1 cup flour</i>	<i>4 eggs</i>
<i>½ teaspoon sugar</i>	<i>Zesty Sauce</i>
<i>¼ cup margarine or butter</i>	

Drain and chop oysters. In a saucepan, combine margarine and milk over low heat. Add flour and sugar, all at once, and stir vigorously until mixture forms a ball and leaves the sides of the pan. Remove from heat. Add unbeaten eggs, one at a time, beating thoroughly after each addition. Continue beating until a stiff batter is formed. Add oysters to the batter and mix well. Drop the mixture by teaspoonfuls into hot oil, 365 degrees. Fry for approximately 4 to 5 minutes or until brown. Drain on absorbent paper. Makes about 60 beignets. Serve immediately with Zesty Sauce. **To make Zesty Sauce,** combine ¾ cup chili sauce, ¼ cup finely minced celery, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 1 tablespoon horseradish and ½ teaspoon salt. Mix ingredients and chill. Makes approximately 1 cup sauce.

Oysters Opulent

Feature the abundance of oysters in a bubbly hot casserole . . . and you thought fried and raw were the only ways!

<i>1 pint fresh oysters</i>	<i>1 can (10½ ounces) cream of mushroom soup</i>
<i>¼ cup margarine</i>	<i>½ teaspoon salt</i>
<i>1 cup chopped celery</i>	<i>5 drops liquid hot pepper sauce</i>
<i>¾ cup chopped onion</i>	<i>1 bay leaf</i>
<i>4 sliced, hard-cooked eggs</i>	<i>½ cup bread crumbs</i>
<i>1 can (7½ ounces) arti- choke hearts</i>	

Drain oysters. In saucepan, melt margarine and sauté celery and onion until almost done. Add oysters and cook 2 to 3 minutes until edges curl. Stir in remaining ingredients except crumbs. Pour into casserole and top with bread crumbs. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees until mixture is bubbly and crumbs brown, about 12 minutes. Makes 6 servings. Sauce will be thin, so hot cooked rice or toast points are good accompaniments. **NOTE:** For economy, substitute 1 cup sliced zucchini for the artichoke hearts.

Poached Oyster Soup

This delicate soup should precede your favorite seafood entrée.

<i>1 quart fresh oysters</i>	<i>½ cup clam juice</i>
<i>4 tablespoons margarine or butter</i>	<i>2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice</i>
<i>3 tablespoons chopped green onions and tops</i>	<i>¼ teaspoon salt</i>
<i>2 tablespoons chopped green pepper</i>	<i>¼ teaspoon pepper</i>
<i>½ cup dry white wine</i>	<i>½ cup bread croutons</i>
	<i>2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley</i>

In a large saucepan, melt margarine. Add onions and green pepper. Cover and simmer gently for 5 minutes. Increase heat and add oysters and their liquor. Stir until oysters stiffen and the edges curl. Add wine, clam juice, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Heat, but do not boil. Cover and remove from heat. Let oysters poach for 30 seconds. Ladle into warm soup bowls. Sprinkle with croutons and parsley. Makes 6 servings.

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Annette Reddell Hegen
Seafood Consumer Education Specialist
Marine Advisory Service

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