

HOUSE OYSTER STEW (101) Author Howard Delano

Serves two

Ingredients:

1 pint Selects (Approx. 20 -24 med.) fresh shucked oysters, with their saved liquor

1 Tbsp butter

1/3 Cup half & Half cream

Preparation:

- Add oysters, their liquor and butter and to a 1-quart saucepan. Heat over medium low flame. Allow the butter to remain at the surface of the stew, stirring occasionally to provide uniform heating. While butter has a melting point of Approx. 95°F, the time that it takes to melt the complete piece of butter will produce a temperature of Approx. 140°F. The oysters' dark, thin mantle edges will just begin to curl. The protein in the oyster is de-naturing (changing structure) losing liquids into the broth while shrinking and the adductor muscle begins to toughen. **NOTE:** A non-contact, Infrared Thermometer reads surface temperatures and assures perfect results.
- At 140°F add the half & half cream. The cream is used mainly to provide the color and additional richness to the stew. *The addition of cream should not be overdone as it can dominate the flavor from fresh shucked oysters and their liquor.* Stir briefly to provide uniform color. Lower heat and cook approximately 30 to 45 seconds to raise the temperature back to 140°-150°F. Remove from heat. Do not over overcook.
- Divide and serve in heated bowls with lightly browned toast. Add fresh ground black pepper to taste.

Above 140°F many of the oysters' proteins will de-nature (change structure), shrink and the adductor muscle will become tougher. At 160°F the oysters will be reduced in size to three quarters to one half of the original size.

Milk, an emulsion of fat, water & protein, will break (curdle) if heated to 180°F. A temperature of 180°F produces the "smiling" effect (surface motions) prior to boiling. If this happens the stew is curdled and overcooked.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Bulletin No 740 dated January 13, 1919 was a study of industry standards for washing and shipping oysters in the United States. This study included many variations of washing and preparation of oysters for sale to the general public and addressed safety and all aspects of the nutritional value resulting from the methods used by the oyster houses and shippers.

The following conclusions in the final study summery were very interesting:

"CHEMICAL CHANGES' OCCURRING IN OYSTERS. SUMMARY"

5. "If oysters are agitated in fresh water, either by mechanical means or by means of a blast of air, a **large increase in volume results** in a short space of time, amounting to as much as 35 per cent in 30 minutes, and to as much as 50 per cent in 90 minutes in these experiments. This increase is believed to be due to osmotic action. As many shucked oysters prepared for the market are washed by this method and sold by measure, it follows that the consumer may be buying added water".

6. "When oysters were washed in unpolluted water of approximately the same salinity as that in which they were grown, no increase in volume was found to occur, the actual loss of nutrients was slight, and the oysters were cleaned as effectually as they were by being washed in fresh water."

Shuck your own or search to find oysters that have been shucked carefully, saving part of the oyster liquor, by local oyster workers and in their unwashed state for the best flavor. If you wish, you can wash oysters one by one in their liquor, examine for shell and remove any solids from the liquor by pouring the liquor through a fine mesh ladle.

My Grandfather, JD, would make his own Rappahannock River water every winter in a wash tub and add the oysters while in shell to rehydrate oysters that had been out of water for longer than a couple of days. Oysters will use up the oxygen even in a suspended animation state so they can only remain in the salted water a matter of a few hours.

Make a friend. Help a fellow oyster lover by offering to hold his bought oysters in shell at your dock for a few days.

Fine sea salt may be added to fresh water to approximate the water they came from. *Oysters will die in fresh water.*

1 tablespoon fine sea salt= 15 grams 1-gallon fresh water= 3,785 grams

Rappahannock River oysters need 17-19 ppt (parts per thousand). 72 grams/3,785 grams or 4.8 Tbsp/gallon

Chesapeake Bay oysters need 27-29 ppt. or 109 grams/3,785 grams or 7.3 Tbsp/gallon.

