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## Finding Lowly Mussel Edible Is Delightful . . . But Maddening

The author of this article is Bea Harvey, a housewife and teacher of business subjects in Fairfield, Conn. She says that her hobbies are boys and girls (her own and others), Cape Cod and books. She was "raised on fish chowder and cranberry pie and tales of Cape Cod and Shiverick clippers by a grandfather who sailed the seven seas," and educated at Boston University and Columbia University. She is a regular Summer resident and conducts a "continuing love affair with Cape Cod."

Columbus discovered America, but Mary Lu discovered the mussel was edible, at least as far as our family is concerned, although I have to admit she learned it from a Summer playmate. All the world seemed to know this, but we were evidently waiting for the proper year and proper introduction — "meet the edible mussel." You can really eat them on Cape Cod, too.

Now nothing is so maddening to me, at least, as to have something obvious pointed out to me about things or places right under my nose. So it was with the mussel, that bluish-black bivalve that has been hanging around the Cape (literally hanging, not even the decency to go bury itself) for years. I had to be shown by vacationists, via Mary Lu, that here was a sweet, succulent viand, mine for the gathering. And all I had to do all these years was to look in the dictionary and discover this fact for myself.

Mus' sel, mus' cle, n. 1. Any of certain marine bivalve mollusks (genus *Mytilus* and related genera). The common mussel is much used as food.

### Discovers Recipes

To add ignominy to insult, my "America's Cook Book" contained three recipes for serving them: Mussels baked with cheese, scrambled eggs with mussels, mussels a la mariniere. But I've looked through all the old cook books, and although they offer recipes by the dozen for cooking every fish and shellfish imaginable, not a mention of the mussel. Even Joseph Lincoln, in his book, "Cape Cod Yesterdays," writing about delicious shellfish found in these waters, scorns mention of this bivalve. I don't think he thought they could be eaten.

I had seen them on European menus, but had the impression that our Cape mussel was a non-edible cousin. As far back as I can recall, mussels and bait were synonymous. Once, when a child, I was digging clams with my grandfather, and queried him as to why mussels couldn't be eaten. They were right on the rocks, begging to be gathered, instead of slithering down into the sand.

"They're fit only for seagulls or bait — folks don't eat 'em," said grandfather. That settled the question for several decades for me and mine.

And then last Summer, Mary Lu, the twelve year old, returned from swimming with her bathing cap full of mussels.

"Why have you brought those things up from the beach? They'll only die and smell!"

### "Fish Bait" Is Delicious

Mary Lu: "I want to cook and eat them! Susie got them, too. Her mother and father said they're delicious. They buy them to eat at the fish market in Baltimore."

After twenty minutes of mighty scrubbing and manicuring of the shellfish to free them of barnacles and sand, she heated the frying pan, added butter and slivers of onion in lieu of garlic, and dumped them in. Over the slow heat, the shells opened, and the mussels cooked, simmering gently in their own juice and onion butter.

Frankly, they were deliciously sweet and tender, but as I glanced at the empty shells, I wondered drearily what the grandparents would have said if they could have seen their descendants feasting on "fish bait."

After dark I gathered up the shells and carried them way down behind the barn to dump them. Then I stamped on the shells, thinking of the story of how poor folks, years ago, when lobsters were considered poisonous, used to feast on them in secret and then bury the shells so their neighbors wouldn't know how hard up they were.

But a week later I pitched in with Mary Lu gathering gifts from the sea. Then I discovered the recipes for them, and improvised on my own, feeling very continental as I served them

from a chafing dish in a newburg sauce much to the delight of young and old.

### A French Delight

A young friend of ours who spent a winter with her GI husband, stationed at an Army base near La Rochelle, France, near the Bay of Biscay, says that they learned from the French how to eat and appreciate mussels. She tells how, before pay day, when the larder was bare, and the checker low, they bought a whole bag of them for a franc, steamed them, and dined delightfully with the addition of salad, crusty French bread, and wine.

Wholesale buyers of mussels state that December is the month that their quality is highest, especially those that come from

Maine and Rhode Island. During the Summer, the Long Island mussel is considered the best.

Italy and France have appreciated and consumed mussels for years, and in this country, New Jersey and New York lead in their consumption. The Italians are said to be the most exacting in purchasing them, prying open their shells to see if any gravel or small crabs can be detected, and if so, rejecting them.

Although very swish metropolitan hotels and restaurants feature them on their menu, it was not until last Summer that I found them served in a Cape restaurant.

### Newberg Recipe

Within the last few months I've noted that several magazines on home-making were featuring recipes for the mussel. So, whatever else you do on your Cape vacation, I beg of you to try the mussel if you haven't already done so. And to enjoy them to the utmost, if possible, gather them for yourself. You'll find not only mussels but serenity, and your troubles will waft away with the breeze as you walk along the sun-warmed beaches of the Cape that wind like a glistening silver ribbon along her blue waters.

Here is the Newburg Sauce from the "America's Cook Book" that is utterly divine, rich, smooth, and sherry flavored.

Open, by slow baking in the oven, enough mussels for two cups.

2 cups mussels; 2 tablespoons butter; ¼ cup sherry; 2 tablespoons brandy; 3 egg yolks, slightly beaten; ½ cup thin cream; ½ teaspoon salt; cayenne; nutmeg and 6 slices toast.

Cook mussels in butter three minutes; add liquors and cook one minute longer. Mix egg yolks and cream, add to mussels and cook just until mixture thickens, stirring constantly; if overcooked, sauce will curdle. Remove from fire immediately, season with salt, cayene and nutmeg, and serve at once on toast or crisp crackers, or in patty shells. Approximate yield: 6 portions.

See you musseling!