



Oven-Steamed Mussels

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 14: At the Seafood Counter

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

To even out the cooking of our steamed mussels and prevent overcooking, we move them to the gentle, enveloping heat of the oven, in a large roasting pan, so they aren't too crowded.

Serves 2 to 4

Discard any mussel with an unpleasant odor or with a cracked or broken shell or a shell that won't close. Serve with crusty bread.

INGREDIENTS

- 1** tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 3** garlic cloves, minced
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- 1** cup dry white wine
- 3** sprigs fresh thyme
- 2** bay leaves
- 4** pounds mussels, scrubbed and debearded
- 1/4** teaspoon salt
- 2** tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
- 2** tablespoons minced fresh parsley

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Heat oil, garlic, and pepper flakes in large roasting pan over medium heat; cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add wine, thyme sprigs, and bay leaves and bring to boil. Cook until wine is slightly reduced, about 1 minute. Add mussels and salt. Cover pan tightly with aluminum foil and transfer to oven. Cook until most mussels have opened (a few may remain closed), 15 to 18 minutes.

2. Remove pan from oven. Push mussels to sides of pan. Add butter to center and whisk until melted. Discard thyme sprigs and bay leaves, sprinkle parsley over mussels, and toss to combine. Serve immediately.

TECHNIQUE

COMMON MUSSEL GROUPS

The first mussels were farmed, as legend has it, in 1235 by a shipwrecked Irish sailor who planted two wooden poles affixed with a net into the seabed in hopes of catching birds. He caught no birds but did discover that mussels had

colonized the bottoms of the poles. Today, nearly 90 percent of mussels eaten around the world are farmed. In the United States we import most of our farmed mussels from Canada and occasionally Europe.

BLUE MUSSEL: Cultivated mainly in Canada, the North Atlantic blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), with its distinctive blue-black shell and narrow wedge shape, is by far the most common variety sold in the United States. Its peak seasons are winter and spring. The blue mussel has a small body, with a “meaty,” “dense” texture, and a pronounced sweetness.



MEDITERRANEAN MUSSEL: The so-called Mediterranean mussel (*Mytilus galloprovincialis*), which is grown on the West Coast or imported from Europe, has a slightly broader cross section than the blue mussel. Its peak seasons are summer and fall. These bivalves have plump bodies, with a softer texture than that of the blue mussel, and a “briny,” “pleasantly fishy” flavor.



TECHNIQUE

THE PROBLEM WITH THE POT

Because mussels steamed in a pot are crowded on top of one another, it’s difficult to stir (or shake) them around—and cook them evenly. The mussels closest to the heat source cook faster than the ones on top.

CLOSE AND CROWDED: In a pot, mussels stuck on the bottom open more quickly.



TECHNIQUE

“BEARDED”? DON’T WORRY.

Because of the way they’re cultivated, most mussels these days are free of the fibrous strands, or “beards,” that wild mussels use to hold on to rocks and other surfaces. If your mussel has a beard, simply use a clean dish towel to grasp the beard and then pull it firmly to remove.



TECHNIQUE

SIX GOOD THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT MUSSELS

1. They’re safe to eat. Mussels are routinely tested by state and local agencies for the presence of algae-derived toxins. The Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch program calls them a “Best Choice” for environmental sustainability.
2. They need almost no cleaning. Most mussels are cultivated on long ropes suspended from rafts, which leaves them free of sand and grit—and for the most part, beards. In general, all they need is a quick rinse under the tap.

3. It's easy to tell when they're fresh. A live mussel will smell pleasantly briny. If open, its shell should close up when lightly tapped (but give it a moment; some mussels take longer than others to clam up).
4. It's equally easy to tell when they're not. A dead mussel deteriorates rapidly and will smell almost immediately. Also discard any mussel with a cracked or broken shell or a shell that won't close.
5. You can store mussels for up to three days. As soon as you bring them home, place them in a bowl, cover it with a wet paper towel, and store it in the fridge.
6. Unopened cooked mussels needn't be discarded. A mussel that's closed after cooking isn't unfit to eat. It's a sign that the mussel needs more cooking. To open a reluctant mussel, microwave it briefly (30 seconds or so).