

Clam Chowder with Bacon

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Ad Hoc at Home (Artisan)

This is a classic chowder, with potatoes, cream, and fresh clams, but we use littlenecks or Manila clams, rather than big quahogs ("chowder clams"), because they're a little sweeter and tastier. The bacon is essential, because the smokiness of the pork pairs so well with the sweet clams.

Yield: 6 servings (makes 3 quarts)

Ingredients:

8 ounces applewood-smoked slab bacon
Canola oil
2 cups coarsely chopped leeks (white and green parts only)
2 cups coarsely chopped onions
5 garlic cloves
Kosher salt
2 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch dice
1 Sachet

Clams

4 pounds littleneck or Manila clams
1 1/4 cups kosher salt
2 tablespoons (1 ounce) unsalted butter
1/3 cup chopped shallots
2 thyme sprigs
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup dry white wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc

4 1/2 tablespoons (2 1/4 ounces) unsalted butter
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
3 cups whole milk
3 cups heavy cream
3 tablespoons finely chopped chives

Method:

Cut the bacon into lardons that measure 1 inch by 1/2 inch thick.

Heat some canola oil in an 8- to 10-quart stockpot over medium heat. Add the bacon, reduce the heat to low, and let the fat render for 20 to 25 minutes, stirring from time to time; the bacon should color but not crisp. Using a slotted spoon, remove the bacon from the pan.

Add the leeks, onions, and garlic to the pan and stir to coat with the bacon fat. Sprinkle with salt, cover with a parchment lid, and cook very slowly for 30 to 35 minutes, until the vegetables are tender. Remove and discard the parchment lid.

Put the potatoes, sachet, and 2 teaspoons salt in a large saucepan, add cold water to cover, bring to a simmer, and cook until the potatoes are just tender, about 10 minutes. Drain and spread on a tray to cool; discard the sachet.

Use a clean scouring pad to scrub any sand from the shells of the clams. Put the clams in a large bowl. Mix 8 cups of water and the salt in another bowl, stirring to dissolve the salt. Pour enough of the water over the clams to cover, and soak for

about 5 minutes, to purge them of any sand.

Lift the clams from the water, drain the water, and repeat the soaking one more time. Drain the clams and rinse under cold water.

When the vegetables are tender, increase the heat to medium and add the butter. Once the butter has melted, stir in the flour to coat the vegetables and cook for 2 to 3 minutes to take away the raw flour taste. Whisk in the milk and cream, season to taste with salt and pepper, and bring to a very low simmer.

Meanwhile, preheat the broiler. Melt the 2 tablespoons butter in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the shallots and thyme sprigs, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring, for about 1 minute, until the shallots are tender. Add the wine, bring to a boil, and cook for 2 minutes to evaporate some of the alcohol. Add the clams, cover the pan, and cook for about 4 minutes, removing the clams as they open. Strain all the clam liquid through a fine-mesh conical strainer into a bowl.

Shell the clams and set aside.

Gently stir clam liquid to taste into the soup (avoid any sand that may have settled in the bottom of the bowl). Season the chowder with salt and pepper to taste. Gently stir in the potatoes, and add about two-thirds of the clams.

Spread the bacon in a small frying pan and crisp over medium-high heat.

Garnish the soup with the bacon, the remaining clams, and chives.

Recipe Notes: