

Title:

Regional Cuisine - New England Clam Chowder

Word Count:

533

Summary:

Sea air, crisp apples, the brisk, spice of fallen leaves - there are few things that say autumn in New England like the scents that seem to buffet the senses from everywhere. Among those marvelous treats for the senses are popular dishes from appetizer to dessert that you just won't find - or at least won't find quite the same way - anywhere else in the country. If you doubt it, there's always an ad that was popular this past autumn - after the Red Sox won the World Series. I...

Keywords:

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Article Body:

Sea air, crisp apples, the brisk, spice of fallen leaves - there are few things that say autumn in New England like the scents that seem to buffet the senses from everywhere. Among those marvelous treats for the senses are popular dishes from appetizer to dessert that you just won't find - or at least won't find quite the same way - anywhere else in the country. If you doubt it, there's always an ad that was popular this past autumn - after the Red Sox won the World Series. In it, a man was explaining, "Son, when you live in New England there are three basic truths... clam chowder is white..."

And the other two truths don't matter. We New Englanders take our clam chowder seriously. Up and down the New England coast throughout the autumn, nearly every town and township has its Chowder Festival. Throughout the six states, restaurants cook up pots of chowder from their best recipes and compete to be named Best Clam Chowder. The granddaddy of all New England Chowder Festivals is held in Newport, Rhode Island, where dozens of area restaurants compete for the title of 'America's Best Clam Chowder'.

It's a simple enough dish, but like chili in Texas and crab cakes in Maryland, every cook has their own special twist on the recipe. There are the basics: clams, potatoes and milk. From there, it's every chef for himself. Some swear that clam chowder without salt pork is just potage. Others insist that clam chowder can't be made without onion. Chefs nearly come to blows over whether

heavy cream should ever be used and why a butter and flour roux is a better base than clam liquor. Secret recipes abound - and everyone has their favorites.

My own personal favorite is the thick, creamy, eat-it-with-a-fork variety of clam chowder served at Legal Seafood and Au Bon Pain in Boston. Rich and laden with chunks of potato, meaty bits of clam, onions, garlic and salt pork, it's a meal rather than an opener for one. Served with a slab of homemade bread slathered with butter, it's guaranteed to raise your cholesterol level and please your taste buds for hours.

While many chefs cry sacrilege, others believe that fresh corn adds the perfect touch of crisp sweetness to the rich broth and pungent bits of clam meat. Corn isn't the only bone of contention when it comes to this regional specialty. Purists insist that the only real ingredients in clam chowder are clams, water, milk, onions, potatoes and butter. They argue whether chowder should be made with mussels or littlenecks (if you're in Maine, it's littlenecks - in Connecticut, mussels. Anywhere else - it varies), whether to add the clam bellies or just the necks, even whether clams should be steamed 'virgin' or with garlic, wine or beer.

Whether you like your chowder thick or thin, with or without corn, flavored with salt pork or bacon or something else entirely, there is one thing on which all New Englanders agree - clam chowder is white. We're not sure what it is that they serve in Manhattan - but it's not clam chowder.