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How To Shuck Oysters

By Bridget Shirvell - November 2, 2012



Bridget Shirvell

Oysters, mollusks with a hard, gray-green irregular shaped shell and salty meat inside, are an acquired taste. But once you **fall in love with oysters**, you can't help ordering them every time they crop up on a menu.

Eating one is like biting into a **piece of the sea**. While **shellfish lovers** appreciate oysters raw **on the half shell**, shucked as a key ingredient in **seafood dishes such as ceviche**, and in drinks such as **tequila-oyster shooters**, many shy away from cooking with oysters at home. Opening an oyster shell can be a daunting task, but it certainly doesn't have to be.

When selecting oysters live in the shell, freshness is key. Buy oysters from a trusted seafood outlet or if you don't have one nearby, a larger supermarket. Always ask when the oysters came into the store. You want oysters harvested that day. Eat oysters within a few hours to 24 hours of harvesting.

Many seafood shops will let you choose your oysters, and you'll find them kept on ice. To ensure freshness look for oysters that have a tightly closed hard shell, smell like the sea and have round or teardrop shaped shells. An easy test is to bang two oysters together. If they sound like rocks hitting each other the meat inside is fresh. If you can, pick oysters that have tiny holes where the top and bottom shells meet. This has more to do with the ease of opening, rather than freshness.

Opening an oyster:

Your first step to success is to use the right knife. Oyster knives have short, thin blades with a curve at the tip. They should be easy to find at most kitchen and/or home supply stores. Grab a cloth towel and wrap it around the hand that will hold the oyster. This will prevent the oyster from slipping and protect your hand.

Now place the oyster on the edge of a counter or other flat hard surface. Make sure the opening of the oyster is facing you and hold the oyster with the hand wrapped in the towel.

Grasp the knife with your free hand, the tip of the knife curving up. Place the tip of the knife in the little hole at the hinge that connects the oyster shells. (If you selected oysters with tiny holes near the top and bottom shells, this is easier to manage.)

Don't jam the knife; instead gently wiggle it inside the oyster. Now gently twist the knife -- you could lower your elbow for leverage -- until you hear a pop. The top shell of the oyster should lift off and you'll be able to use the knife to cut the muscle of the oyster at the other end.

If you love raw oysters, just slurp one down! No prep needed. If you're cooking the oyster, gently use the knife to separate the oyster from the bottom shell. Now you're ready to add it to your favorite dish.

Want to try your own preparation at home? We enlisted Austin-based chef James Holmes of **Olivia** and **Lucy's Fried Chicken** to help us create the perfect Latin flavors for oysters. Here's his take on Oysters Diablo:

Happy Shucking!

Oysters Diablo

- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 shallot
- 2 habanero peppers
- 2 habanero peppers, minced



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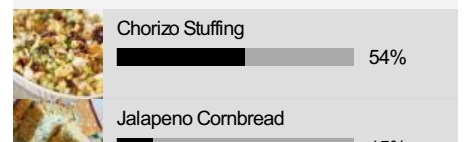


Catching Up with Hugo Ortega

The Houston-based Mexican chef talks his new book, Hugo Ortega's Street Food of Mexico.

Poll of the week

Which of these Latin dishes will we find on your Thanksgiving table?



- 2 fresh jalapenos
- 2 dozen oysters on the half shell
- ½ cup white vinegar
- ½ packet lardons
- * salt for seasoning
- * grated parmesan cheese for seasoning



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