Holiday Oyster Stew

*From the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory*

**Source**
This holiday oyster stew recipe comes from GCRL marketing specialist Anita Arguelles, who grew up in oysterless Memphis. Anita’s husband-to-be, Mike Arguelles, wooed Anita and ultimately lured her to the Coast with this old family recipe from The Point in Biloxi. After 20 years, Mike still togs fresh oysters from the Pass Christian reefs, but Anita has taken over making the oyster stew. Mike says Anita’s improvements over the years have made this recipe the best he’s ever tasted.

**Serves 4 to 6**

**Tips from the Cook**
My traditional Gulf Coast recipe for oyster stew is thinner than some other versions. Don’t gauge your success by what you find in our local restaurants. They tend to serve this warm and richly flavorful dish thicker than traditional recipes. Try serving my version with toasted bread on the side.

Be sure to reserve the liquid—or liquor—released when shucking the oysters. Take care that your oyster shucker has not let any bits of sand and shell get into the container. Bits of sand and shell are a problem in our household, so my method is to remove the oysters and gently and quickly rinse them under a cold stream of water. I can hear the shrieks of culinary blasphemy now. Fine—don’t rinse and just eat a little grit. As an alternative to rinsing, you can usually remove most of the grit by swirling the oysters and liquid in a bowl, allowing the grit to settle to the bottom, and then carefully removing the oysters and most of the liquid.

Lightly and quickly sauté the oysters in butter with a little kosher salt (till the edges barely ruffle) and set them aside. The oysters make their own liquid and that all goes into the stew. If you are prone to sampling, use some restraint or your guests will be chiding you about where all the oysters went. Not to worry if oyster shucking is not in your culinary skill set and you don’t have a family shucker. Just purchase a container of freshly shucked oysters. Usually shell and sand have not been included in the purchased oyster containers. (They rinse!)

**Ingredients**

- 25 -30 shucked oysters
- 1 cup oyster liquor reserved (Take the liquor off the top with a small cup.)
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 large shallot, minced (looks like a smaller purplish version of an onion)
- 1 stalk celery, minced
- 1 teaspoons all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 2 cups heavy cream
1 tablespoon dry sherry  
1 teaspoon lemon juice  
1 teaspoon fresh parsley leaves, minced (Reserve a little for garnish.)  
1 teaspoon minced fresh chives  
Pinch cayenne pepper, ground  
Add kosher salt and ground pepper to taste  
Hot chili sesame oil for garnish

Instructions

1. Heat 1 tablespoon of butter in a sauté pan over medium heat.
2. Add drained oysters with a pinch of kosher salt. Gently sauté oysters until edges are ruffled. Set aside.
3. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoon of butter in a large saucepan over medium-low heat until foaming
4. Add the shallot and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant and translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the celery and cook until slightly softened, about 2 minutes. Stir in the flour and cook, stirring constantly, until bubbly, about 20 seconds to make a light roux. Stir in the wine and simmer until thickened and bubbly, about 20 seconds.
5. Stir in the cream and return to a simmer. Simmer to blend the flavors and cook the flour, about 5 minutes. Add the sherry, lemon juice, parsley, chives, cayenne, salt to taste, and oyster liquor. Return to a simmer and add the oysters. (Adjust the seasonings and serve immediately.)

Garnish
Top with minced parsley and a drop or two of hot chili sesame oil if you have it.

Variations
Add a handful of fresh spinach, chopped if you have it. Sauté spinach with the oysters.

This is the first in a series of recipes that highlight the wealth of delicious local seafood ingredients available on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Do you have a family favorite? Get in touch; perhaps we can add it to the collection.

Look for more Mississippi seafood recipes on the web at www.usm.edu/gcrl/public/recipes

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