

FRESH FISH

A FEARLESS GUIDE TO
GRILLING, SHUCKING, SEARING, POACHING,
AND ROASTING SEAFOOD



JENNIFER TRAINER THOMPSON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KELLER+KELLER



Lobster-Clambake

To New Englanders, the clambake is as cherished and steeped in tradition as Paul Revere's ride. Clambakes are primal rituals, big boisterous affairs, usually held in high summer. Like a tailgate picnic, they are best done with a group, for they take a lot of time, but lots of helping hands add to the fun. The hardest part is collecting wet seaweed. It is so worth it — don't be deterred.

Look at the tides, and make sure you build your bake at the high-water mark, as you'll need about 7 hours from start to the time you eat. After spending the day gathering seaweed and firewood, building the pit, and eating your feast, you'll want to linger by the fire to enjoy the night sky, so bring blankets, fixings for s'mores, and some good rum. Clambakes comprise three of my favorite activities: digging in the sand, enjoying a beach bonfire, and eating buttery shellfish with my fingers. This is the original Native American finger food — no bibs needed and you can wash your fingers in the surf.

FOR THE FEAST (SERVES 8–10)

- 8–10 lobsters, kept alive under wet seaweed
- 8 pounds steamers (soft-shell clams), soaked in seawater for several hours, drained, and put in a wire basket or tied up in several layers of damp cheesecloth
- 8–10 large potatoes, scrubbed and tied in several layers of damp cheesecloth
- 6 medium onions, loose skin removed, with an X cut in the root ends, and tied in several layers of damp cheesecloth
- 10 ears unhusked corn, soaked in seawater and tied in several layers of damp cheesecloth
- 3 pounds of spicy sausage (linquiça, chouriço, andouille, kielbasa), tied in several layers of damp cheesecloth
- 3 sticks unsalted butter

FOR THE FIRE

- Several yards of cheesecloth or wire baskets to hold the clams, corn, onions, potatoes, and sausage
- Canvas tarp (at least 5 feet square when doubled over)
- Trash can or other container large enough to hold the canvas covered in seawater
- Buckets for collecting seaweed
- Seaweed (lots of it!)
- Shovels for digging (the more the merrier — it's the pits to get stuck digging alone)
- Firewood
- Large stones that haven't been heated before
- Iron rake, pitchfork, or boat hook
- Heavy pan or saucepan with lid, for melting the butter



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Lobster-Clambake Step-by-Step continued



1. Divide and conquer! Put the canvas in the trash can, cover with seawater, and leave to soak. Set a group to digging a big hole in the sand near the high-water mark, 2 feet deep by 4 feet wide. Send another crew out to collect enough seaweed to make three heavy layers over the fire. Dried seaweed can be added to the trash can to revive it.

2. Line the bottom and sides of the hole with beach stones the size of footballs.

3. Light a big hardwood fire in the pit and let it burn down.



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4. Place more stones on the fire, making sure you don't smother it. Build another fire on top of the second layer of rocks and let it burn down.



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5. Place the food in wire baskets or tie it up in loose cheesecloth slings. Dampen the cheesecloth with seawater so it doesn't catch on fire. You're now ready to cook.



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6. Working quickly, rake the embers away from the rocks, then throw a full 6 inches of wet seaweed over the rocks.

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Lobster-Clambake Step-by-Step continued



7. Put the potatoes, onions, and sausage on the seaweed and cover them with more wet seaweed. Add the lobster, corn, and clams. Cover with a final layer of wet seaweed.

8. Cover the mound with the wet canvas.

9. Seal the edges with sand and more seaweed so steam can't escape. Cook for 1½ hours, occasionally dousing the canvas with water. In the last 30 minutes or so, set the butter in a covered pan near the fire to melt.



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10. When it's time to eat, dig the sand and seaweed away from the pit.

11. Carefully lift the corners of the canvas and peel it back, making sure sand doesn't get on the food.

12. Rake away the layers of seaweed, lifting out the food as it's exposed. Serve immediately with melted butter.

SERVES 8-10

WHAT GOES WELL WITH A CLAMBAKE?

- Coleslaw and other raw vegetable salads
- Easy appetizers to munch on, such as guacamole and chips, cheese and crackers, olives and nuts
- Beer, wine, and a good rum or whiskey for sipping on the rocks as the fire burns down
- Plenty of water, lemonade, and other thirst quenchers
- Watermelon or fresh mangoes for dessert
- Frisbee, kite, beach ball, volleyball, bocce ball, fireworks





