

inviting ideas

Welcome New Year with lobster



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I love to celebrate New Year's Eve in the confines of my own home - not that we always do. Some years we are invited to elegant and wonderful parties and just can't say no, other years, it's been a wedding or an anniversary party, we just couldn't miss. When we have the opportunity to do a quiet New Year's celebration at home ... I get out our lobster bibs, crackers, and pics, and order those delectable 2-3 pounders!

Needless to say, lobster juice dripping down my arms may not be the most endearing sight - when I eat lobster, I really eat lobster (and I don't get dressed up - my grubbies are the perfect attire for this feast!)

My insatiable taste for lobster goes way back - even as a child, I loved the Peanut-stuffed Lobster at the old Clam Shop in Detroit.

Eating a whole lobster shouldn't be neat and tidy - this is an eating adventure that goes way beyond what proper etiquette dictates - perhaps that's why my mom would always order the Lobster Tail, and politely use her knife and fork, as if it were just another meat entree.

If doing lobsters for the Big Eve - indulge - enjoy - live it up - order whole lobsters!

Other tips in the Lobster arena:

- Local fish and specialty shops will be happy to take your order for lobsters - make sure you place your orders far enough in advance. These specialty shops will have them flown in and waiting for you - the size of your choosing.

- Most grocery stores have a tank

with live lobsters - usually 1-1 1/4 pounds each.

- You can find lots of mail order direct lobsters on the Internet.

- Some mail order sources include: Bramhall's Lobster Wharf & Shipping Co. (Maine Lobsters) 1-800-793-0343 or e-mail: wharf@midcoast.com

- Lobster Direct (Nova Scotia Lobsters) 1-800-N5-Claws

- Commercial Lobster Company (New England Lobsters Direct) 1-800-225-6240

- When picking up, or picking out, live lobsters, make sure they are active. A listless lobster, is not a good sign - never accept a lobster that is not moving at all, it could be dead, or likely contaminated.

- A cooked lobster should have a tail that is curled, indicating that it was alive when cooked.

- Never keep live lobster (or any shellfish) in fresh water - it will kill them.

- Don't store live lobsters in a plastic bag.

- Live lobsters will keep alive in the refrigerator, or under refrigerated conditions for 12 hours (most will survive a 24 hour period). It is best to keep them covered with a damp cloth or a layer of seaweed to provide moisture.

- Lobster is low in calories, saturated fat and cholesterol. Lobster meat contains omega-3 unsaturated fatty acids, the substances that seem to reduce hardening of the arteries.

- There is no taste difference between lobsters that have been cooked with rubber bands on their claws or those cooked with no bands - according to tests conducted at the University of Maine.

- A one - two pound lobster is considered an adequate portion for one person (unless you are inviting me to dinner!)

- Approximately two cups of lobster meat equal one pound.

- You know your lobster is cooked when the antennae pulls out easily.

- The green-stuff in the cooked lobster is the "tomalley" - the tomalley functions as a combination of intestine, liver and pancreas - it is not only edible, but quite delicious (to some).

- The red-stuff you sometimes see in the cooked lobster is the roe, or unfertilized eggs - this is called the "coral" - this part is also edible, and many find it quite delicious.

- Larger lobsters don't seem to be tougher than smaller lobsters.

How to cook Lobsters:

Lobsters can be boiled, steamed, broiled, grilled or baked. The most common ways seem to be steaming and boiling. An old Cape-Codder once told me "it is best to hypnotize your lobster before placing them in the boiling water" this may be an old wives tale...but I personally do it.

I place the live lobster on my counter - and rub it from the head down to the tail in consistent motions (like they say to hypnotize an alligator, not that I would) - until the legs drop and it appears to be asleep - I know this sounds a bit wacky, but I think my tail would tense up if someone threw me in a pot of hot water!!

To steam lobsters: place approximately 2 inches of seawater or salted freshwater in the bottom of a large pot or kettle. Bring the water to a rolling boil. Place the live lobsters in the pot, one at a time (grasping them just behind the claws). Let the water return to a boil and begin timing - approximately 18 minutes for a 1 to 1 1/4 pounder or 20 minutes for a 1 1/2 pounder - if the shells are soft - reduce the time by approximately three minutes.

To boil lobsters: fill a large pot or kettle three-quarters full - If seawater is not available, add 2 tablespoons of water to each quart. Allow 2 1/2 quarts of water for each lobster. Bring the water to a rolling boil, place in the live lobsters, one at a time, and allow the water to come back to a boil. Lower the heat source, and lid the pot - simmer for 15 minutes for a 1-1 1/4 pounder and 20 minutes for a 1 1/2 - 2 pounder.

If soft shelled, reduce the time by three minutes.

Remember: you know the lobster is cooked when the antennae pulls out easily.

More Tips:

- Buy a roll(s) of festive wrapping paper, and use as your table covering - when you are through, you can roll it all up and discard it - no ruining good linens with melted butter.

- Use fresh, or new dish towels for napkins - they are great for absorbing all that extra liquid.

- Have extra towels for bibs or paper bibs available.

- Have nut crackers or lobster crackers available for cracking the shells.

- Everyone should have their own warm melted butter/or margarine for dipping their lobster meat.

- Any leftover cooked lobster meat will keep in the refrigerator for 3-4 days.

If going to New York on holiday and Looking for Lobster - try Smith and Wollensky Steak & Chop House (one of my favorite haunts) located on 201 East 49th Street in Manhattan - the corner of 3rd and 49th - (212) 753-1530. They commonly serve 3-6 pound lobsters nightly - you will see everyone (except me) splitting a five pounder with their spouse, I always have my own!

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