

ran with it.

("It's all the same to the clam," observed Shel Silverstein). And yet, for multiple millennia, they've sat at the center of one of humanity's most communal and complex eating rituals: The clambake. Clambakes are equal parts feast, ceremony, and festival. The iconic New England meal requires an entire day (if you're not counting food shopping) of toiling on the beach. That means digging an enormous hole (at least 36 inches) on the beach and lining it with stones, lighting a fire to heat the

rocks, raking the ashes aside after the fire has burnt down, and then layering in the seaweed and seafood, before covering all of it with a tarp and finally waiting for the steam from the seaweed to cook everything and infuse it with a delectably smoky flavor. It's an arduous process. That said, precious few of us have access to a private beach where we can just go dig a gargantuan hole. Hiring a professional caterer makes the price point skyrocket, and besides, then you and your friends lose the experience of cooking together.

So then, how does your average home cook go about planning and executing all of the fun of a answer, we found, may just come from the history of the meal itself.

summer clambake, without taking on so much expense and trouble that it's no longer worth it? The Take a page from the Wompanoag tradition

Folklore has it that Native Americans passed on the ancient ceremonial practice of cooking

shellfish over hot stones in the ground to early New England settlers, who then took the ritual and

In her book, Clambake, Katherine D. Neustadt says Wompanoag members conveyed "a portrayal of native clambaking without romanticized drama" that was just "a convenient way to have a big feed

for a lot of people." In other words, Native Americans cooked their seafood underground with the same perfunctory attitude that today we have about grilling burgers on our back patio—one far more about necessity than fanfare.

Historic details aside, though, there's no denying that the clambake can still make for one fine shindig. With any luck and a little planning, you'll wind up with an event that isn't as tedious or time consuming as a full classic clambake, but is still just as delicious and fun. clambake

barbecues. Though he's become a maestro of the full clambake, he says, "I also learned growing up doing seafood at home that you don't need to go as elaborate as all that. At your house, do something

and your friends are drinking while you make it."

lobster, then add your clams.

Think more clam boil than clambake

Photo by Chef Robert Sisca

He also recommends exploring other customizations, like adapting your ingredients setup to other variations of the clambake. The Portuguese version adds linguiça (spicy sausage) to the mix. In the Mid-Atlantic, littleneck clams stand in for New England's steamer clams. Louisianians sub crawfish for lobster. Or do as clambakers on the West Coast do, and opt for Dungeness crabs. But—need we say it?— always opt for local and fresh seafood over novelty every time.

With clam boils, the seaweed is optional for creating the required steam, and gets generally

replaced by water, beer, or white wine. Sisca reaches for white wine when making the dish in his

restaurant kitchen, and for rosé in the recipe below. But at home, he says, just use "whatever you

Chef Robert Sisca will be spotlighting a mack daddy version of such a hybrid on the menu at The

his father on Long Island, and has memories of holding clambakes at home, often in lieu of

simple. Make everything in one huge pot. You'll get so much flavor from the seafood, you won't

"With a clam boil at home, you can more easily improvise in the moment. And you can do things

miss a thing." Enter the clambake's much lower-maintenance cousin: the clamboil.

like customize it by using just clams or mussels if your budget won't allow for lobster."

Steam the seafood with whatever you're drinking

As for getting that and coveted smokiness into the dish, if you aren't digging a hole and actually smoking anything? Sisca relies on seaweed dulse flakes that add smoky flavors to the broth. He orders Mara Seaweed's Dulse Flakes from Scotland, though plenty of other contenders are available Stateside, as well.

The biggest issue with steaming in one big pot on the stove or on your grill, warns Sisca, is not

overcooking. "Once your shellfish are opened, they're almost cooked. So, he says, "Start with the

Then add the mussels in, and steam them all together." Meanwhile, you can be entertaining the

pot, and just telling stories and listening to great music," he adds. Just like the first settlers.

whole time you're cooking. "I love getting guests involved in the timing of putting everything in the

Serves 4-6 **Ingredients:**

· 2 pounds marble potatoes, or other small potatoes · 2 spicy chorizo sausages, sliced · 24 littleneck and/or steamer clams, soaked in water and scrubbed to remove an excess dirt or

sand · 4 pounds mussels, soaked and scrubbed

New England Clam Boil Recipe

· 2 pounds shrimp, peeled and deveined

· 3 whole lobsters

· 4 ears of corn

· 4 cups clam stock or water · 1 Tablespoon Old Bay or Chesapeake Bay seasoning

· 1 teaspoon chili flakes · 1 onion, diced · 5 cloves garlic, diced

· 1 teaspoon dulse flakes · 1 Tablespoon olive oil · 1 bottle chardonnay or rosé

· 2 lemons juiced · 1 bunch parsley, chopped · 1 French baguette, sliced

· 8 ounces butter, melted

Reduce by half. 3. Add stock or water, add lobster, clams and cover. Cook for 5 minutes. Add mussels and cover and cook for 5 more minutes. Remove any unopened shellfish. Add corn and steam for 3 minutes. 4. Finish with lemon juice and parsley. 5. Serve the melted butter in a bowl on the side for dipping.

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the fat is rendered out.

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1. In the bottom of a huge pot, heat up olive oil and cook the chorizo until it is cooked through and

2. Add onions and garlic. Cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add mara seaweed, chili flake,

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Alexandra Hall is a New England-based writer covering food and travel. She has written for The New York Times, Bon Appetit,

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old bay, thyme, bay leaf and toast for 1 minute. Add small potatoes, deglaze with 2 cups of rose.

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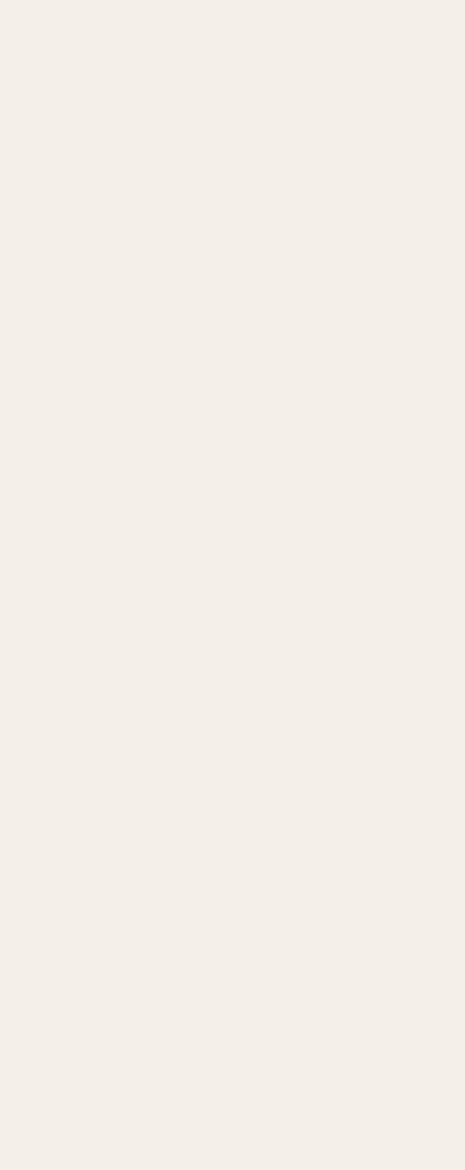
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Banks Fish House. Sisca knows clambakes. A dedicated fisherman as well as chef, he's been rolling them out for decades at events and restaurants all over the East Coast. He also grew up fishing with

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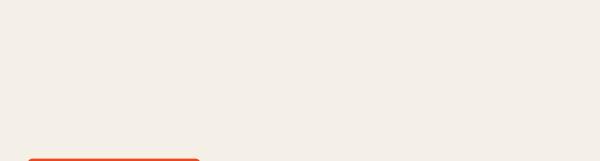
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