

COAL-ROASTED CLAMS

WITH BLISTERED CHILES AND LINGUINE

SERVES: 4 | PREP TIME: 25 MINUTES | GRILLING TIME: 7 TO 10 MINUTES

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: CHARCOAL GRILL, ALL-NATURAL LUMP CHARCOAL, PERFORATED GRILL PAN

- 4 small red cherry chile peppers (pimiento chile peppers)
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 large garlic cloves, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1 cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 pounds live littleneck or manila clams, scrubbed
- 1 pound dried linguine or spaghetti pasta
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley leaves, divided
- ¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
- Freshly ground black pepper

How's this for a new way to cook clams? Roast them right over lump charcoal. This technique is a contemporary version of an old Native American tradition called a clambake, which involves digging a pit in the sand and cooking shellfish buried among wood embers, hot stones, and steaming blankets of seaweed. In this recipe I've added the charred flavors and fairly mild spiciness of blistered (not blackened) red cherry peppers. If you prefer your food hotter, use jalapeño chile peppers instead, or add a little more crushed red pepper flakes to the dish.

- 1 Prepare the charcoal grill with all-natural lump charcoal for direct cooking over medium heat (350° to 450°F).
- 2 Grill the red cherry peppers over **direct medium heat**, with the lid closed, until blistered, not blackened, all over, 3 to 5 minutes, turning as needed. Remove from the grill and, when cool enough to handle, cut the peppers lengthwise in half, discard the stems and seeds, and cut crosswise into thin slices. Set aside.
- 3 In a large, deep skillet over medium heat on the stove, warm the oil. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes and sauté until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the wine, lemon juice, and salt. Bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and cover.
- 4 Arrange the clams in single layer on a perforated grill pan. Wearing insulated barbecue mitts or gloves, remove the cooking grate from the grill, and then place the pan with the clams directly on the coals (the coals should be covered with ash, glowing red, with no black remaining). Close the lid and grill the clams until they open, 4 to 5 minutes. Carefully transfer the pan from the grill to a heatproof surface. Discard any unopened clams. Transfer the clams with any of the juices in the shells to the skillet with the wine mixture.
- 5 Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add the linguine and cook until it's about 1 minute short of al dente. Drain the linguine, reserving ½ cup of the pasta water. Add the linguine, red cherry peppers, 2 tablespoons of the parsley, the butter, and lemon zest to the skillet (add some of the reserved pasta water if desired). Place the skillet over medium-high heat on the stove and toss the pasta until coated with the sauce and heated through. Season with pepper. Serve warm, garnished with the remaining parsley.

This is a case where it's best to cook entirely with all-natural lump charcoal. The chemicals and processed coal sometimes added to briquettes could get into the clams, so use lump charcoal that is nothing more than pieces of hardwood that have been burned down to charcoal in a low-oxygen environment.

The smaller and tenderer varieties of clams taste better here. Littleneck clams from the Atlantic coast are usually the most expensive because of their brilliantly briny sweetness. Manila clams from the Pacific Coast work well, too. Try to get the tender ones that are about an inch wide or less.

