

Oysters Bienville

Serves 8-10

1-tablespoon vegetable oil
2/3 cup finely chopped white mushroom
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
1-1/2 teaspoons very finely chopped garlic
4 large shallots, finely chopped
1/2 pound cooked shrimp, finely diced
1-tablespoon all-purpose flour
1/2 cup brandy
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon ground white pepper
6 tablespoons grated Romano cheese
4 tablespoons dry breadcrumbs
1/4 cup finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 teaspoon Kosher or sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon Cayenne pepper

2 dozen plump, salty, oysters, freshly shucked and the flat sides of the shells reserved
(Note: For these baked oyster dishes, fat, briny oysters about the size of a fifty-cent piece are perfect.)

About two rock salt (optional)

Lemon wedges wrapped in muslin sleeves, for serving

In a large, heavy saucepan, warm the vegetable oil and sauté the chopped mushroom for 4 minutes, stirring. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon, press with another spoon to remove excess liquid and set aside.

In the same pan, melt the butter over low heat and sauté the garlic and the shallots for about three minutes, stirring frequently, until softened.

Add the shrimp and stir to mix, then sprinkle evenly with the flour.
Stir together, add the reserved mushroom and increase heat to medium.

Stirring constantly, deglaze the pan with the brandy. Stir in the cream and cook for two to three minutes, until smooth. Stir in Romano, dry breadcrumbs, parsley, salt, a touch of black pepper and the Cayenne to soft, moundable consistency. A small amount of milk may be added if the mixture is too thick.

Remove the pan from the heat and transfer the mixture to a glass or ceramic bowl. Cool to room temperature, then refrigerate for about 1 1/2 hours, or until thoroughly chilled.

Preheat oven to 400°. Wash the oyster shells well and pat dry. Drain the oysters and place one each in each of the 24 shells, or use two smaller oysters per shell if necessary.

Place the shells in a large, heavy roasting pan lined with a 1/2-inch layer rock salt, or place six filled oyster shells in each pie of four pie pans line with salt (the salt keeps the upright during cooking and stops the delicious juices from escaping).

Top each oyster with one generous tablespoon of the Bienville mix and bake for 15 to 18 minutes, or until nicely browned.

The shells will be extremely hot. Carefully place 6 oysters on each hot dinner plate. If baked in pans of rock salt, place each pan on a dinner plate.

Garnished with a wrapped lemon wedge and serve immediately.

Oysters Kathryn

Serves six

1 (7.8 ounce) can artichoke hearts, drained and finely chopped
1/2 cup fresh breadcrumbs
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/2 teaspoon finely chopped fresh basil
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
Juice of 1 lemon\1 clove garlic, very finely chopped
Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground pepper
6 lemon wedges wrapped in muslin sleeves, for serving
3 dozen plump, salty oysters, preferably freshly shucked (in any event, you will need the flat sides of the shells for serving)
6 pans rock salt (optional)

In a mixing bowl, combine the chopped artichoke hearts, breadcrumbs, egg, cream, basil, Parmesan, lemon juice and garlic. Season to taste with salt and pepper and combine thoroughly, using a fork.

Cover and refrigerate for at least half an hour and up two hours. Preheat the oven to 400°. Scrub the oyster shells well and pat them dry. Drain the oyster and place one in each shell. Place the shells on a large, heavy roasting pan (or place six oysters in each pan of rock salt). Top each oyster with generous tablespoon of the topping mixture, smoothing it into a mound. Bake for 15 to 18 minutes, until the tops are nicely browned.

The shells will be extremely hot. Carefully place 6 oysters on each hot dinner plate (or, if baked in pans of rock salt, place each pan on dinner plate). Garnish with a wrapped lemon wedge and serve.