



BAKED CLAMS

Category: Popular

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Baked Clams

Baked clams, also known as clams casino or stuffed clams, are a beloved appetizer that has graced tables from casual seafood shacks to upscale restaurants for decades.

This dish combines the briny sweetness of fresh clams with a savory, often bread-based stuffing, creating a perfect balance of flavors and textures.

The origins of baked clams can be traced back to Rhode Island in the early 20th century. Legend has it that the dish was first created in 1917 at the Little Casino in Narragansett, Rhode Island, for a woman named Mrs. Paran Stevens, a wealthy summer resident from New York City.

The maître d'hôtel, Julius Keller, named the dish after the hotel, and it quickly became popular among the resort's visitors.

Traditional clams casino recipes typically include a mixture of breadcrumbs, herbs, bacon, and butter, but variations abound. Some recipes incorporate cheese, while others focus on a spicier profile with the addition of hot peppers.

The versatility of this dish allows for countless interpretations, making it adaptable to various tastes and dietary preferences.

What makes baked clams so appealing is the contrast between the tender, juicy clam meat and the crispy, flavorful topping. When done right, each bite offers a delightful combination of textures – the slight chewiness of the clam, the crunch of the breadcrumbs, and sometimes the crispiness of bacon.

This recipe will guide you through creating your own baked clams at home. Whether you're preparing them for a special occasion, a summer gathering, or simply to enjoy a taste of the sea, these baked clams are sure to impress with their rich flavor and elegant presentation.

Ingredients:

- (Serves 6-8 as an appetizer)

For the clams:

- 24 littleneck clams, scrubbed clean
- 1 cup dry white wine

- 1 cup water

For the stuffing:

- 4 slices bacon, finely chopped
- 1 shallot, finely minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1/4 cup unsalted butter, melted
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

For garnish:

- Lemon wedges
- Additional chopped parsley

How to Make:

Prepare the clams:

Rinse the clams thoroughly under cold water, scrubbing to remove any sand or debris.

In a large pot, combine the white wine and water. Bring to a simmer over medium heat.

Add the clams, cover, and steam for 5-7 minutes, or until the clams have opened.

Remove the clams with a slotted spoon, discarding any that haven't opened.

Once cool enough to handle, separate the clam meat from the shells, keeping the shells intact for stuffing.

Chop the clam meat coarsely and set aside.

Prepare the stuffing:

In a large skillet, cook the chopped bacon over medium heat until crispy. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside, leaving the bacon fat in the pan.

In the same skillet, sauté the minced shallot, garlic, and red bell pepper in the bacon fat until softened, about 3-4 minutes.

In a large bowl, combine the sautéed vegetables, crispy bacon, panko breadcrumbs, Parmesan cheese, chopped parsley, thyme leaves, and red pepper flakes (if using).

Add the melted butter and beaten egg to the mixture, stirring until well combined.

Gently fold in the chopped clam meat.

Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Stuff and bake the clams:

Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C).

Arrange the reserved clam shells on a baking sheet.

Spoon the stuffing mixture into each shell, mounding it slightly.

Bake for 12-15 minutes, or until the stuffing is golden brown and crispy on top.

Serve:

Arrange the baked clams on a serving platter.

Garnish with lemon wedges and additional chopped parsley.

Serve immediately while hot.

Chef's Notes:

Clam selection: Littleneck clams are ideal for this recipe due to their size and sweetness. However, you can also use cherrystone clams if littlenecks are unavailable.

Shell cleaning: After steaming, make sure to clean the shells thoroughly before stuffing. This ensures a more appealing

presentation.

Bacon alternatives: For a lighter version, you can omit the bacon or substitute it with pancetta or even finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes for a vegetarian option.

Breadcrumb variations: While panko breadcrumbs provide a nice crunch, you can use regular breadcrumbs or even crushed crackers as an alternative.

Herb substitutions: Feel free to experiment with different herbs. Oregano, basil, or cilantro can add interesting flavor profiles to the dish.

Make-ahead option: You can prepare the stuffed clams up to a day in advance. Keep them refrigerated and add an extra 2-3 minutes to the baking time when cooking from chilled.

Leftover ideas: If you have any leftover stuffing, it can be used to stuff mushrooms or as a topping for baked fish.

Serving suggestions: While delicious on their own, baked clams pair well with a crisp white wine or a light beer. They can be served as an appetizer or as part of a larger seafood platter.

Grilling option: For a smoky flavor, you can grill the stuffed clams instead of baking. Place them on a grill over medium heat for about 6-8 minutes.

Nutritional Value: (Per serving, based on 8 servings)

Please note that these values are approximate and can vary based on specific ingredients and portion sizes:

- Calories: 180-200 kcal
- Total Fat: 10-12g
- Saturated Fat: 5-6g
- Monounsaturated Fat: 3-4g
- Polyunsaturated Fat: 1-2g
- Cholesterol: 50-60mg
- Sodium: 300-350mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 12-15g
- Dietary Fiber: 1-2g
- Sugars: 1-2g
- Protein: 10-12g

Baked clams offer several nutritional benefits, although they should be enjoyed in moderation as part of a balanced diet:

High-Quality Protein: Clams are an excellent source of lean protein, which is essential for muscle maintenance and repair.

Low in Calories: Clams are relatively low in calories, making them a good choice for those watching their calorie intake.

Rich in Minerals: Clams are particularly high in:

Iron: Important for red blood cell formation and oxygen transport

Zinc: Essential for immune function and wound healing

Selenium: An antioxidant that supports thyroid function

Vitamin B12: Crucial for nerve function and the formation of red blood cells

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: While not as high in omega-3s as some fish, clams do contain these beneficial fats, which are important for heart and brain health.

Low in Mercury: Clams are generally low in mercury compared to many other types of seafood, making them a safer choice for regular consumption.

It's worth noting that the nutritional profile of baked clams can vary significantly based on the ingredients used in the stuffing. The addition of bacon and cheese increases the fat and calorie content, while the breadcrumbs add carbohydrates.

For those with dietary concerns:

Sodium: The sodium content can be high, particularly if bacon is used. Those watching their sodium intake should be mindful of portion sizes.

Gluten: The breadcrumbs contain gluten. For a gluten-free version, use gluten-free breadcrumbs or substitute with almond flour.

Cholesterol: Clams are relatively high in cholesterol. However, dietary cholesterol doesn't affect blood cholesterol levels in most people as much as previously thought.

Shellfish Allergies: This dish is not suitable for individuals with shellfish allergies.

While baked clams can be a nutritious part of a balanced diet, it's important to consider portion sizes and frequency of consumption, particularly due to their relatively high cholesterol and sodium content. Pairing them with a salad or vegetable side dish can help create a more balanced meal.

As with all seafood dishes, it's crucial to source fresh, high-quality clams from reputable suppliers to ensure both safety and the best flavor. When prepared properly, baked clams offer a delicious way to enjoy the nutritional benefits of seafood in a flavorful, satisfying dish.

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