



The Menu:

French-Inspired Canapés and Mussels with Shrimp

Instead of a traditional appetizer course, we like to start our mussels dinner with a selection of one-bite canapés. Here is one of our favourites for a mussels dinner:

CUCUMBER LOONIES

Yield: Serves 6-8 as an appetizer

Ingredients:

- 5 mini English cucumbers
- 1 ½ tbsp rice wine vinegar
- ¼ small white onion, sliced lengthwise
- 2 tsp poppy or black sesame seeds
- Sea salt and black pepper, to taste

Method:

- 1 Peel and slice cucumbers into 1" thick rounds.
- 2 In a medium bowl, add the sliced cucumbers, rice wine vinegar and onions. Toss to coat completely.
- 3 Refrigerate at least 30 minutes and up to 3 hours.
- 4 Transfer to a serving bowl, sprinkle with poppy or sesame seeds and serve.

As the canapés disappear, it's time for the main course: in addition to the mussels, we are adding some poached shrimp over a pasta with spicy tomato-arrabbiata sauce.

MUSSELS & SHRIMP WITH PASTA IN ARRABBIATA SAUCE

Yield: Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients:

- 1 package (500g) of long pasta, such as spaghetti or fettuccine
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 6 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 jars (1L) Arrabbiata or tomato sauce
- 4 lb mussels, pre-washed
- 2 lb (16 to 20) shrimp, pre-cooked
- 1 cup Italian parsley
- 2 tsp chili flakes (optional)



Method:

- 1 Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain, toss with ¼ cup of the olive oil and set aside while you prepare the sauce.
- 2 In a large pan with a lid, heat the remaining ¼ cup of olive oil. Add the onions and garlic until translucent, approximately 5 minutes.
- 3 Add the jars of sauce and increase the heat to high to bring the sauce to a simmer.
- 4 Once simmering, add the mussels and shrimp; stir to ensure the mussels and shrimp are coated in the sauce.
- 5 Cover with the lid and cook until all the mussels have opened, approximately 5 minutes. Discard any that have not opened.
- 6 Divide the pasta among bowls and top with the mussels and shrimp sauce.
- 7 Finely chop the Italian parsley and sprinkle over each bowl. Serve with chili flakes.

For dessert, lemon tiramisu served in individual glasses makes for a light and refreshing end to the evening and is easy to prepare ahead of time:



LEMON TIRAMISU

Yield: Makes 6-8

Ingredients:

- 24 ladyfinger cookies
- 2 cups lemon simple syrup, or lemon liqueur
- 2 cups lemon curd
- 1 ½ cups mascarpone, softened
- 3 cups sweetened whipped cream
- 2 pints raspberries
- 10 sprigs of fresh mint

Method:

- 1 Set aside 6 to 8 serving glasses.
- 2 Dip two ladyfinger cookies in the lemon simple syrup and place in the bottom of a glass, breaking them in half if required.
- 3 Layer 3 tbsp lemon curd, 1 tbsp mascarpone, and 3 tbsp whipped cream on top of the ladyfinger cookies.
- 4 Dip two more ladyfinger cookies in the lemon simple syrup and layer them on top.
- 5 Repeat for remaining glasses.
- 6 Garnish with raspberries and mint. Refrigerate up to two hours before serving and serve chilled.

What's on the Bar:

Pairing Drinks with Mussels

Shellfish can be tricky to pair with cocktails, so we recommend offering two classic options along with a selection of wines:

Boulevardier – A whiskey-based cocktail similar to a Negroni, perfect as a pre-dinner drink.

Fernet Martini – A simple cocktail made with gin, sweet vermouth, and Fernet Branca, garnished with an orange twist.

Wine – Offer a variety of both reds and whites. Introduce a few new bottles alongside your favourites to keep things interesting.

Final Preparations and Time-Saving Tips

- 1 Two to three days out: Purchase specialty items, grocery shop, and stock your bar.
- 2 The day before: Prepare the lemon tiramisu, set the table, and buy the mussels.
- 3 The day of: Purchase florals, prepare the canapés, and assemble the final dishes.

With these recipes and tips, you can create a memorable evening that celebrates the joy of good food and great company.

*Bon
appétit!*

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Hosting a

French Inspired

Mussels Dinner Party

A Simple Yet Elegant Guide by Sebastien and Sheila Centner

Photography By Bruce Gibson

If you've ever spent time in the south of France, you know that the region's cuisine is as diverse as its landscapes.

We've long been captivated by France's culinary traditions, and between our frequent visits there and Sebastien's French heritage, we love to infuse our entertaining with a touch of French cuisine whenever we can.

There is something quintessentially French about mussels that resonates with us, and we're thrilled to share how you can create an unforgettable mussels dinner for your friends and family.

Demystifying Mussels: A Simple Approach

For many, mussels are a dish best left to the professionals. The thought of preparing them at home can seem intimidating, but it really isn't. With a straightforward recipe and a few basic ingredients, creating a delicious (and impressive) mussels dinner that rivals any restaurant experience is much simpler than you would imagine.

When hosting a mussels dinner, we prefer to keep appetizers to a minimum, especially when the mussels are paired with pasta. Light, colourful canapés are perfect for whetting your guests' appetites without filling them up before the main course. In the spirit of European dining, we often serve the salad course as a palate cleanser after the main course and before dessert.

Setting the Scene: A Rustic Table for a Cozy Meal

Family-style meals are all about comfort, so we like to keep our table setting simple and rustic but still visually appealing. Wooden cutting boards make great substitutes for side plates or serving platters and add a rustic theme that eliminates the need for a tablecloth.

When setting the table for large groups or for family-style service, it's important to plan ahead. Leave some open space to avoid overcrowding and try to stay away from large floral arrangements. Instead, consider using smaller bouquets. Three or four small bouquets should do it; deep colours like burgundy, dark red and green will complement the rustic theme beautifully.

To personalize the table for this meal, we added miniature baguettes wrapped in craft paper and fitted with place cards. Not only are these baguette place setting accents Instagram-worthy, but they are also functional, since there's nothing better to sop up the sauce from the mussels course.