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CHOWDERS

Rhode Island Clear Broth Clam Chowder

The rich broth of this delicious clear broth Rhode Island clam chowder is loaded with potatoes, bacon, and either cherry-stones or quahogs.

Yankee Magazine • February 16, 2021 • Read Comments (51)

3.19 avg. rating (63% score) - 181 votes

Photo: Kristin Teig

Rhode Island Clear Broth Clam Chowder

No wonder Rhode Islanders prefer clear broth over cream—at every turn, they're surrounded by saltwater. To savor the Ocean State's take on clear broth clam chowder, visit Matunuck Oyster Bar, overlooking the eddies of Potter Pond in South Kingstown. The rich broth of this clear broth Rhode Island clam chowder is loaded with potatoes, bacon, and either cherry-stones or quahogs (same species of hard-shell clam, quahogs being bigger than cherrystones), depending on what's fresh that day. Owner Perry Raso is so fastidious about his shellfish that he operates his own seven-acre oyster farm right by the restaurant.

For more, check out some of our favorite other chowder recipes, how to make clam chowder, and where to find the 10 best clam shacks in New England.

Total Time: 1 hour 15 minutes
Hands-On Time: 45 minutes
Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Matunuck Clear Broth Clam Chowder

Ingredients

- 8 pounds small quahogs or large cherrystone clams
- 7 cups water
- 6 cups clam broth (from steaming) or 4 cups clam broth plus 2 cups bottled clam juice
- 3 slices thick-sliced bacon, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 medium-size onions, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- 3 ribs celery, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 pounds Yukon Gold or other all-purpose potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh chives
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh dill
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Instructions

Scrub the clams and rinse them clean.

Add 7 cups of water to a large stockpot fitted with a steamer basket or colander, and bring to a boil.

Add half the clams to the basket and cover. Steam until the clams open, 5 to 10 minutes. (Discard any clams that don't open.)

Repeat with the second batch of clams. Reserve 6 cups of the broth. Set aside.

Cool the clams; remove the meat from the shells and dice it into ½-inch pieces. Keep them covered and refrigerated until ready to use.

Put the bacon in a 5- to 7-quart pot over medium heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 10 minutes.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the bacon fat, leaving the bacon in the pot. Reduce the heat to medium-low.

Add the butter, onions, celery, and bay leaves, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are softened but not browned, 6 to 8 minutes.

Add the potatoes and reserved clam broth to the pot. Continue cooking over medium heat until the chowder begins to simmer. If it begins to boil, reduce the heat slightly. Cook until the potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

Just before serving, remove the pot from the heat, stir in the clams and herbs, discard the bay leaves, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve hot.

Note: Steaming the clams might seem laborious, but it's actually easy and makes a briny broth. Aim to extract 6 cups of broth from the clams; if not, you'll need to have some bottled clam juice on hand to round it out.

Related Articles

Dick Bridges' Classic Lobster Chowder

New England Corn Chowder

Helen's Haddock Fish Chowder

Comments

Reader L. February 16, 2021
If using Salt Pork, how much? By weight, inches?
Reply

Walter A. February 16, 2021
My father and I would dig our own quahogs in Green Hill or Charlestown Pond back in the 60's and 70's. We always used only quahogs, salt pork, potatoes, salt and pepper. Simple and tasty.
Reply

Denise C. February 16, 2021
Going to make this as soon as I find some quality clams, quahogs are hard to find too in Las Vegas. Loved it when I was growing up in Providence RI. Never had it in a restaurant, we always made it at home. Yum!
Reply

Jackie August 25, 2020
The clear Rhode Island Clam Chowder is actually my sister Dee Dee's favorite. she uis usually able to get it at the Rhode Island building at the Eastern State Exposition each autumn but recently discovered that Lenny & joe's Restaurant in Madison, CT makes a good version.
Reply

Barbara B. March 1, 2020
Chowder best w/quahogs. Only spices are s &p. Use only salt pork/not bacon. Spent summers on cape cod. Uncle was a commercial fisherman. Aunt was a great cook
Reply

> Mary S. August 16, 2020
> My grandmother only used salt pork. Sounds like you cook the way she did. Her chowder is the one I like the best. I rarely have the creamy chowder. Not my thing!
> Reply
>
> > Reader L. January 10, 2021
> > Exactly the kind I make and like!
> > Reply

Rich February 13, 2020
You can make it however you want. Obviously it is a clear broth but It is ok to have herbs and bacon in it. That is what makes chowder good because everyone makes it differently.
Reply

Judith C. February 9, 2020
Yum! Have to stop reading and go make some chowdah!
Reply

Reader L. February 7, 2020
Chopmist Charlie's in Jamestown, RI. Chowder and stuffies. Mmm, good!
Reply

> Legendre T. February 16, 2021
> Never had RI clam chowder till I had some at the Cove (now closed) in Mystic Ct. I considered that the best. When in RI, Ct., or Mass coasts I always get the clear broth chowder. I like NE chowder but it's never consistent. Always get RI chowder if it's available.
> Reply

Juliet R. February 3, 2020
I am so happy to see this recipe posted. I truly detest thick Boston style chowder. I like the think broth. Bacon or salt pork? Which ever I have on hand suits me and I have even made it meat free for friends to don't eat meat. Only spices I use of black pepper and (salt of course), and the flat leaf Italian style parseley. My husband adds from red pepper flakes.
Reply

Charles H. February 3, 2020
Real quahog chowder never uses bacon unless it is uncured it uses salt pork. No bay leaf or dill either. The only quahogs used are the large "hogs" not little necks or cherry stones. Large quahogs have a much stronger flavor.
Reply

> Linda M. February 3, 2020
> There is also no herbs, just salt and pepper.
> Reply
>
> JM February 4, 2020
> I have to agree with Quahogs only, Salt Pork, and no herbs, salt and pepper only
> Reply
>
> > Barbara B. March 1, 2020
> > I agree. No herbs.
> > Reply
> >
> > Alice E. February 16, 2021
> > I agree salt pork no herbs just s+p
> > Reply

Frances F. February 3, 2020
Chef sigmonds in MArston Mills MA is back and sells frozen chowder base. He might ship. I did a sappy dance when he reopened, it's that good!
Reply

Joseph M. November 16, 2019
I would like to know where i can purchase and have shipped to me Rhode Island Clear clam chowder. I have No car, totaly disabled.
Reply

> Norma G. February 3, 2020
> Where do you live?
> Reply

Albert November 1, 2019
If you order the clear clam chowder at Matunuck Oyster Bar, be sure to order some clams on the side. Twice In a row I had to send the chowder back due to lack of shellfish. But DO order their oysters – incredibly good.
Reply

Mary D. November 1, 2019
I would like the recipe for the Rhode Island clam chowder that diane17 commented about. I have looked through the archive recipes and can't locate that recipe. Thank you. mdoty@charter.net
Reply

Charles G. August 23, 2019
Drooling!!
Reply

Carl A Strand J. July 20, 2019
Our clear broth clam chowder consists of salt pork, diced onions sauteed in the rendered pork fat, red potatoes sliced 1/8 inch thick with the skin on and shucked quahogs. The potatoes are boiled with the sauteed onions in the clam broth with enough water to cover until tender. The drained quahogs are ground in a meat grinder with the coarse blade and then added to the potato onion broth until heated through. If doing this the day before being served, it's important to cool the chowder in an ice water bath, otherwise the potatoes will sour. This is a thick chowder and could be thinned with some water if desired.
Reply

Diane A. July 11, 2019
Any REAL Rhode Islander does not put bay leaves, celery, dill, parsley or chives in clear chowder or quahog chowder. It is made of onions, salt pork or bacon, potatoes, quahogs. The comment from the person who said to user Snow's clams is wrong. Snow's clams are sea clams, giant clams that are chopped up. They have almost no flavor. Some restaurants fancy up their chowder but authentic Rhode Island chowder is simple. My father dug quahogs and we ate this all the time. I make it the same way and always get rave reviews. Yankee Magazine has in the past published the recipe.
Reply

> Jon September 12, 2019
> Absolutely Right
> Reply
>
> Bobbie Van E. November 1, 2019
> Yes!
> Reply
>
> Reader L. February 3, 2020
> I agree with you, Dianea17, but my grandma insisted on salt pork, since she said bacon gave the chowder a smoky taste, foreign to the concoction.
> Reply
>
> > Val N. February 3, 2020
> > My grandmother also used salt pork, not bacon. Gramma cooked the salt pork, removed it from the pan when it was just golden and set it aside. Then she cooked her diced onion in the rendered fat. When done, the salt pork was returned to the pan with the onion and all was dusted with a sprinkling of flour, which cooked in the remaining heat of the skillet. Her potatoes were cut in cubes about the size of a sugar lump and boiled in a soup pot to almost fork tender. Then the chopped clams went into the soup pot. Next a cup of the hot potato water was stirred into the skillet of salt pork and onion, and that was stirred on low heat to slightly thicken. That was added to the soup pot, and salt & pepper came last. To me, that is clam chowder.
> > Reply
> >
> > > Thomas September 28, 2020
> > > Wow! This is exactly what I was looking for. My kind of chowder.
> > > Reply
>
> Linda M. February 3, 2020
> I remember digging up quahogs when I was a kid. They had to soak overnight in water to "clear" themselves of sand. The next day the chowder was made as above. It was always so good!!
> Reply

Carol M. July 11, 2019
I grew up on traditional cream based clam chowder but was introduced to Rhode Island chowder by a local Connecticut restaurant long gone. I haven't turned back. I love all the clam chowders but the clear Rhode Island is my favorite.
Reply

Patti K. January 7, 2019
For those of us who love clam chowder but are lactose intolerant, this seems like a terrific alternative. Though my sisters and I make an absolutely delicious red clam chowder, I can't wait to try this!
Reply

eric b. October 22, 2018
sounds better the that red manhatten crap. but being a mainah i'll always prefer my chowders, clam, seafood or corn in a cream broth.
Reply

Reader L. August 23, 2018
Try, American Mussel Harvesters, North Kingstown Rhode Island for the freshest shellfish anywhere in New England from their tanks to your doorstep in 24 hours! I'm talking Restaurant Ready quality. Clams, Oysters, and Mussels. ~Robert
Reply

> Joseph M. November 16, 2019
> do you make and ship clear chowder ?
> Reply

Joyce July 11, 2018
I got fresh clams right from the ocean in Rhode Island and followed this recipe. The chowder was absolutely delicious. I will be using this recipe foe years to come. Than
Reply

Whit G. March 16, 2018
Buy a couple pounds of steamers, eat them and save the broth. Use the steamer broth along with clam broth when you make your chowder. The steamer broth adds a nice sweetness to the chowder. You won't be disappointed.
Reply

Paul B. November 12, 2017
I have always made this chowder when I buy a bag of clams from our local seafood dealer here in NJ. The clams all come from Rhode Island and now I purchase these large quahogs at least every 2 months. They are excellent for all recipes with clams. I save all the broth by placing it in quart and pint containers and freezing it. This is not the glass jar clam broth. 100 times more flavorful. And the large net bag of chowder clams are only are 25.00 to 30.00 dollars. Can't beat them.
Reply

Reader L. November 7, 2017
Such a walk down memory lane. When I was a little girl, my grandparents lived in Wickford, RI and my grandmother always made clear broth "quahog" chowder.
Reply

David L. October 3, 2017
Rick Moonen at Mandalay Bay Las Vegas, NV Serves the clear broth chowder and it is very good…
Reply

Gary B. June 12, 2017
My dear Yankee grandmother made only clear broth clam chowder. Her roots were in SW Rhode/SE Connecticut. No thick wallpaper glue nor tomato laced chowder for her. Thanks Dora Annabelle for influencing my taste buds.
Reply

> Debbie January 9, 2019
> Your grandmother must have been from Westerly/Pawcatuck. I had one grandmother from Westerly, RI and the other grandmother from Pawcatuck, CT. 2 states but one town!!
> Reply

Nancy June 9, 2017
you can purchase the same Snow's clams from Sam's Club
Reply

Samuel B. February 19, 2017
Where's the "Print" button?
Reply

> Aimee T. February 19, 2017
> Hi Samuel. The print button is located just above the recipe photo. It's the green box with the icon of the printer on it. Hope that helps!
> Reply

Larry K. December 18, 2016
I live in AZ. And get clams at Sprouts. This is the most flavorful chowda
Reply

AndrewCabral March 27, 2016
Try Publix for little necks and steamers. They also sell Gaspars Linguiça and Chouriço. Also, look on the Internet for companies who sell clambakes and lobster bakes. Most have great deals. Good luck.
Reply

Christine D. March 9, 2016
I live in SC. Originally from RI and MA. CAN'T find any good clams down here for chowda! Any suggestions?
Reply

> Steve August 11, 2016
> I get these when home in New England (GA now). But you can order here: https://www.amazon.com/dp/B007ZJV7TC/ref=pd_lpo_sbs_dp_ss_2?pf_rd_p=1944687602&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_i=B006W6JCHI&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_r=5D4R20Z6F9J4XWKS4RK9
> Reply

David L. March 9, 2016
Rick Moonen who has 2 restaurants here in Vegas make a wonderful clear Clam Chowder if you google "Rick Moonen Clam Chowder Recipe" you;ll have his recipe… He is from New York originally…
Reply

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Fotoula
Pantazopoulos
fpantazopoulos@southcountyri.com
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