

CURRACH SOUP

Currachs are beautiful, black, low-sided rowing boats and were the traditional form of maritime transport off the west and southwest coasts of Ireland. My mother's first introduction to mussels was as a small girl in the 1920s visiting Connemara with her grandmother and seeing the tall men of the Aran Islands pulling nets of mussels from their boats – sleek and shiny black currachs. The black mussels looked like miniature versions of the currachs!

SERVES 6–8

Ingredients:

1 ¼ kg/3 lbs mussels
225 ml/8 fl oz/1 cup dry
white wine
225 g/8 oz shallots or
onions or spring onions,
finely chopped
1 10 g/4 oz carrots, finely
chopped
1 10 g/4 oz leeks, white part
only
1 celery stalk
1 clove of garlic, crushed
small bunch of parsley, finely
chopped
55 g/2 oz/½ stick butter
900 ml/1 ½ pts/3¾ cups fish
stock
300 ml/½ pt/1 ¼ cups cream

Method:

Clean the mussels under cold water, discarding any that are not tightly closed. Scrape off adhering small shells or barnacles and remove the 'beards' – the small mesh of tough 'hair'.

In a wide-bottomed pot, heat the wine, half of the shallots/onions and the parsley. Add the mussels and cook over a high heat with the lid on until they are all open – this will take only 2-3 minutes. Shell all but 6 of the mussels and reserve the cooking liquid.

Heat the butter in a saucepan and soften the remaining onion, carrots, celery and leeks over a low heat, without browning, for about 10 minutes. Add the stock and the reserved mussel liquor and bring to the boil. Add the mussels and bring back to the boil. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. Process and strain through a sieve. Return to a clean saucepan, add the cream and heat through.

For best effect serve in white bowls, placing one of the unshelled mussels in each. Be careful about seasoning as the mussels are salty.