

Ale-Braised Mussels with Rustic Garlic Toasts

Serves 2-4

Keep mussels in a bowl inside a large bowl filled with ice and cover with a damp cloth or paper towels and use within one day. For the beer, I used Westmalle Trappist Ale, but you can use other Belgian-style beers or ales.

The mussels

2 pounds live mussels
1 to 2 tablespoons butter
½ large onion, thinly sliced
2 celery stalks, thinly sliced
2 large cloves garlic, halved
1 cup ale, such as Belgian style ale (double)

1/4 cup cream**Salt and pepper to taste****Thin strips of zest and the juice from 1 Meyer lemon****The garlic toasts**

4 to 8 quarter inch-thick slices rustic French or Italian loaf
Olive oil

For the mussels: Scrub the mussels under running cold water with a brush or the scrubby side of a clean sponge. Pull out the beards right before you cook them. Gently squeeze any mussels that are open; if they don't close on their own they're dead and should be discarded.

Melt the butter in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onions and celery and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned, 5 minutes. Add three of the garlic halves and cook briefly, then add the beer and mussels. Reduce heat to a simmer, then cover and cook until the all the mussels open, 3-5 minutes. If a few aren't open, stir and return to the heat briefly so they cook evenly.

Pour the cream into the sauce, stir over low heat until just warmed, then season the sauce to taste with salt and pepper. Remove from the heat and quickly stir in the lemon zest and juice. Discard any mussels that did not open.

Serve the mussels in shallow bowls with the sauce and the garlic toasts on the side.

For the garlic toasts: Brush both sides of the bread lightly with olive oil.

Place on a grill pan over medium to medium-high heat and cook until you get nice dark brown grill marks, about 4 minutes, then flip and cook on the other side. If you don't have a grill pan, place bread on a pan and broil for 1-2 minutes per side or until browned.

Rub the toasts with the cut side of the remaining garlic half. Slice in half on the diagonal to serve.

Per serving: 355 calories, 18 g protein, 26 g carbohydrate, 18 g fat (8 g saturated), 70 mg cholesterol, 542 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.

Nutritional analysis

- All recipes in the Food section, except for those in The Exchange column, have been tested by The Chronicle.
- The nutritional analysis that follows each recipe does not include optional ingredients.
- Garnishes and suggested accompaniments are not included unless specific amounts are given.
- When there is a range of servings, the larger number is used.
- If there is a range in the amount of an ingredient, the smaller amount is used.
- When a recipe lists a choice of ingredients (such as butter or margarine), the first is used.
- Salt is figured only if a recipe calls for a specific amount. Salt added to cooking water is not included.
- Broth or stock is unsalted unless otherwise specified.
- Because of variations in ingredients, values are approximations.