

MUSSELS WITH TARRAGON CELERY VINAIGRETTE

SERVES 10 TO 12 (HORS D'OEUVRE)

Active time: 45 min

Start to finish: 1 1/4 hr (includes marinating)

To begin, a little taste of the sea, easily prepared ahead of time. Beautiful, sophisticated, and delicious, mussels are perfect party appetizers. Each bite offers a complex layering of flavors, and the shells make lovely natural dishes.

2 lb mussels (35 to 45; preferably cultivated), scrubbed well and beards removed

1/3 cup dry white wine

2 hard-boiled large eggs

2 tablespoons white-wine vinegar

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/2 cup finely chopped celery

1/2 cup pickled cocktail onions, trimmed and finely chopped

2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon

Garnish: seaweed (see Shopping List, page 246)

- Cook mussels in wine in a 4- to 6-quart pot over moderately high heat, covered, until mussels just open wide, checking frequently after 4 minutes and transferring opened mussels to a large bowl using a slotted spoon. (Discard any unopened mussels after 8 minutes.)
- Pour cooking liquid through a fine-mesh sieve into a 1- to 2-quart heavy saucepan and boil until reduced to about 3 tablespoons, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a bowl.
- Finely chop eggs, then add to reduced liquid along with vinegar, salt, and pepper. Add oil in a slow stream, whisking, then whisk in celery, onions, and tarragon. Season vinaigrette with salt and pepper.
- Remove mussels from shells and reserve 1 half shell from each mussel. Stir mussels (but not shells) into vinaigrette and marinate, covered and chilled, at least 1 hour. Rinse and dry reserved mussel shells, then chill in a sealed plastic bag until ready to use.
- Arrange shells on a large platter lined with seaweed and spoon a mussel with some vinaigrette into each.

Cooks' note:

Mussels can be marinated up to 1 day.