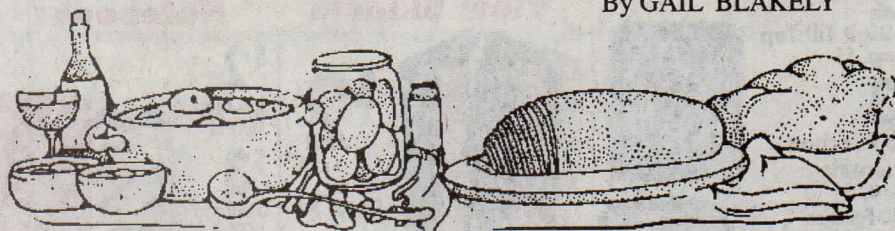


## Gourmets And Good Eaters

By GAIL BLAKELY



One evening some friends brought over a clam dip that was exceptionally good; when I asked about it, they suggested I speak with Diane Paul, who had made it. Turns out she is quite a cook—and she just loves to spend her time down here clamming. We talked about how she learned to clam, as well as how she cooks her catch, at her home on Chase Road in West Falmouth.

"I just find it infinitely relaxing," she explained. "It's become a kind of obsession. I completely zone out and all tension just drifts away. It seems that I am just in the moment—perhaps it's the hunter/gatherer instinct? I just know that I love being in the water, doing something that is fun, and results in something good to eat."

Diane laughed when I asked her how she learned—and by whom she was taught. "I was completely on my own," she recalled. "I couldn't get anyone to tell me anything, with a couple of exceptions. For years I had very little success—sometimes I'd be gone for half a day, and I'd have to stop at the fish store on the way home so I wouldn't come in with just three cherrystones!"

As with many outdoor pastimes, patience prevailed. "After a while I started to watch other people who were clamming, and sometimes I was successful in chatting them up. Not always though," she added with a smile. "Over time, I learned what the best places are, and now I'm happy to go out, whenever I can—winter or summer."

She taught me an important point: "clams" are soft shell (steamers) and quahogs are the hard-shell "clams." Then she told me about a New Year's party she attended one year. "I promised my friends some oysters and cherrystones, but I hadn't realized that low tide was at 6 AM. So there I was, in 16-degree weather, in waders, breaking through the ice at Chapoquoit so we could start off the new year with fresh shellfish."

She says she cooks about 90 percent of her catch, giving the rest away. When I visited, her freezer

was full of plastic containers of clams, all sizes (and labeled), and her refrigerator had a number of plastic bags with more clams still in their shells. "I like to steam the clams open, then puree them before freezing," she said. "Or, I will freeze them briefly, open them, then chop them, or keep them whole, and put them in containers with their juice. This way I know I always have some for cooking."

"Unlike microwaving or otherwise using heat to open hard-shell clams, this method results in no loss of flavor," Diane added. Here are a few of her recipes; directions for making these dishes are in her own words, so you get a better "flavor" (sorry!) for how she cooks. What's very important, she insists, is to watch your clams while they are cooking ("hovering over them with a slotted spoon") in order to remove them as soon as they are done.

### Clam Fritters

(adapted from *Saveur* magazine)

Quahogs (8-10 large quahogs or 12-14 large cherrystones—enough for 2 cups of puree)

Canola oil  
2 tbsp butter  
1/2 cup milk  
1 egg, lightly beaten  
1 cup AP flour  
4 tsp baking powder

Pour canola oil into a large frying pan or pot to a depth of 1 to 1 1/2 inches; heat until very hot (350° F if you have a deep-fry thermometer). Whisk the flour and baking powder with 1 tsp salt, and some freshly ground black pepper into a bowl; set aside. Meanwhile, steam open quahogs in small amount (about 1/2 inch) of water—remove with a slotted spoon the instant they open. When cooled, remove the shells and, if using very large quahogs, any tough muscles [there will be two, to the right and left of the hinge], and puree the meat in a food processor. If you have any fresh green herbs (parsley, cilantro, thyme, or chives), you can throw them in as well.

Stir together the 2 cups pureed quahogs with the milk, butter and egg; if you end up with more than 2 cups of pureed clams, just add a little more flour and baking powder. Add the flour mixture to the clam mixture and stir to combine; working in batches, drop spoonfuls of batter (about a tablespoon each) into hot oil. Fry, turning once, until golden brown and just cooked through, about 3 minutes. Transfer fritters to a paper towel-lined plate and let cool slightly before serving.

### Diane's Quahog Dip

10 large quahogs (about 8 inches



Fresh cherrystones garnish this recipe for pasta in a clam sauce with garlic and herbs.



in diameter), steamed open  
3 shallots  
8 oz cream cheese  
1 to 2 tbsp sour cream

Place the meat from the quahogs in a food processor and pulse a few times to chop; add shallots (and fresh herbs such as chives or scallions if desired) and pulse again. Add the cream cheese, cut into pieces, and puree the mixture. Add some black pepper, and a few tablespoons of sour cream to make it the consistency you need for spreading. Serve on crackers or sliced cucumbers.

#### Pasta With Fresh Clams

1 qt frozen chopped quahogs with liquid  
2 tbsp each: butter and olive oil  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
Chopped fresh herbs, if desired  
1 lb angel hair pasta or linguine  
Black pepper and butter

Heat a large pot of salted water to boiling for the pasta; when you start to cook the pasta, start the sauce. In a large skillet, melt the butter in the oil; add the garlic and cook just until it softens. Add the frozen quahogs and cook for just a minute or two, so that the clams retain the bite of freshness and do not toughen. Add the herbs and black pepper to taste; drain the pasta and toss it with some butter, then add it to the skillet with the clam sauce. Toss well and serve immediately, garnished with a few small cherrystones that have been steamed open at the last minute.



Diane Paul of West Falmouth after a recent excursion digging for quahogs.