

How to Make Chowder

A Chef's Guide to Making Chowder





HOW TO MAKE CHOWDER



A chowder is a thick, rich, chunky soup usually made with a white sauce base, though Manhattan chowders have a tomato base. Originally, it was a fishermen's stew made with seafood, but today, vegetable chowders such as corn chowder and potato chowder are common.

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HOW CHOWDERS ARE MADE

Chowders typically have five parts:

1. The vegetables or seafood, the focal ingredient of the soup.
2. Ancillary ingredients which may include cream, diced onions, bacon, or herbs.
3. The cooking liquid—usually broth or stock.
4. A thickening agent—usually cornstarch, flour, or potatoes.
5. Seasonings including salt and pepper.

How Chowders are Thickened

There are two main methods for making chowder based on how the thickening agent is incorporated into the soup. In the first, the flour is stirred into melted fat or butter in the pan and cooked until it is golden in color. The stock is slowly added, stirring with a whisk to remove any lumps.

In the second method, the starch is added after the soup is assembled. A small amount of the liquid is added to the starch, and the starch is dissolved in the liquid to make a paste. More liquid is added to the paste until it is thinned to a sauce. The sauce is whisked back into the soup and the soup is reheated until it starts to bubble. As the starch approaches boiling, it gelatinizes and thickens the liquid.

To make a chowder:

1. Sauté the vegetables in butter or cook the bacon. The vegetables should be just tender and translucent. Do not overcook them.

2. If you are going to incorporate the starch now, do so. Cook the flour until it is a creamy yellow color.
3. Whisk in the stock until smooth. Add any long cooking vegetables, such as potatoes or carrots, and meat along with the seasonings. Continue to cook the soup. For best flavor, soups should simmer for an hour. Add any quick cooking vegetables like peas after the soup has simmered. Shrimp should be added late in this stage since they cook quickly.
4. If you are adding the starch to the assembled soup, you can do so now using the method outlined above.
5. Make any final adjustments to the soup, adding more seasoning or more thickening if needed.

Tips and troubleshooting for your chowder:

1. Your chowder should be velvety smooth and about the consistency of heavy cream. If it is too thick, thin it out with more stock. If too thin, add more starch as outlined above.
2. Don't use too much cream. Cream will mask the flavors of the soup.
3. If you feel that you've added enough starch and the soup is still thin, bring the soup to a simmer. Grain starches gelatinize from 175 to 205 degrees Fahrenheit, just below a boil. Your soup will not thicken at lower temperatures.
4. If the soup has a pasty taste and mouth feel, there is either too much starch in the soup or the starch is not cooked.
5. If the flavor is weak, it is likely that there is not enough of the main ingredient to impart the desired flavor.

CARING FOR YOUR CLAMS

By Rachel Jones

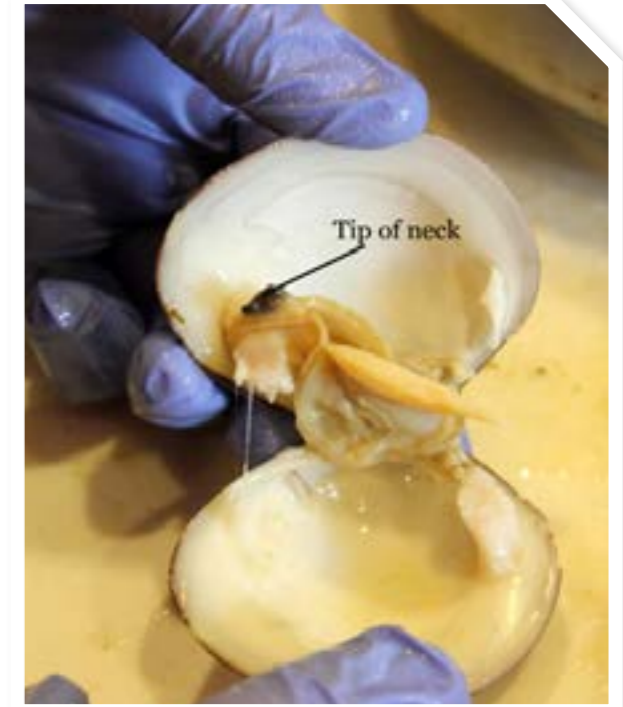


Growing up in New England, clam chowder was a tradition. In the summer time, my family would get together for clam bakes in the back yard, and there was always a great big pot of chowder on the table. It's simple to make, but forgetting to clean your clams properly can ruin the whole batch.

To begin cleaning, place your clams in a bowl of cold water. Rinse and scrub the dirt off the shells. Drain the water and refill your bowl to rinse them again. This should remove the initial layer of dirt.

While the outside of your clams may look clean, the insides are still full of sand. Place them in a bowl and fill it again with cold water, just barely covering the tops of the shells. This time, add 1 to 2 teaspoons of salt into the water (depending on how many clams you're using). Then sprinkle a layer of cornmeal over the top of the water. If you don't have cornmeal, you can substitute it with black pepper.

You'll need to let them soak uncovered for at least an hour. When they're done soaking, you will probably notice the water getting murky and dirty – This is good! Remember your fresh clams are still alive at this point. They live in saltwater normally, so they'll gobble up the salt and cornmeal and spit out the sand and dirt.



Drain that water and rinse the clams once more before preparing them. After they finish soaking, many of the clams will stick their necks out of their shells. This is normal. You should be able to gently tap their shells and their necks will retract. If they don't, the clam is dead and should be thrown away.

Once your clams are cleaned, you're ready to start shucking (or removing the clam from the shell). In a good pot of chowder, texture is everything. So depending on the type of clam you use, you may only add certain parts of it to your soup:

Quahogs – these are the larger clams normally used in chowders and have larger, tougher bellies that are not right for soup. If you're using Quahogs, only add the neck and strip.

Steamers – these clams are much smaller and have tender bellies. These will work fine in your chowder. However, because of their size, steamers can be difficult to shuck raw. You can steam them first in a flavorful liquid. Then both the whole clam and the broth can be used in the chowder. 🍴

NEW ENGLAND STYLE CLAM CHOWDER



The vegetables or seafood, the focal ingredient of this is the real deal. The recipe originated in a culinary school and has been modified for home use. If you make it, it will be as good as that in a fine restaurant. It takes a little time, but it is worth it.

We have made this soup with (2) 6.5 ounce cans of chopped clams in place of the fresh clams.

Ingredients

- about one gallon of clams
- 1 cup salted water
- 3 slices of bacon
- 3 tablespoons of butter
- 1 medium sweet onion, minced
- 1 stalk of celery, chopped

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 medium russet potato, peeled and diced into 1/2 inch cubes
- 1 1/2 cups cream
- salt and pepper as needed
- Tobasco and/or Worcestershire sauce as needed

Directions

1. Wash and prepare your clams as described in the [“Caring for Your Clams”](#) section on page 5. Steam the clams until they open. Discard any that do not open.
2. Pick the meat from the clams, chop them, and set the meat aside.
3. Strain the broth with a fine mesh sieve or cheesecloth and set aside.
4. In a large heavy pan, cook the bacon until crisp. Remove the bacon and chop it into pieces. Pour out any bacon grease leaving a tablespoon or so in the pan.
5. Add the butter, onion, and celery and sauté until crisp-tender.
6. Add the flour and stir until you have paste that is just starting to brown.
7. Gradually add the clam broth—a little at a time—stirring to remove lumps until you have a smooth sauce. Add the rest of the broth.
8. Add the potatoes and cook until they are just tender. Skim any residue from the surface.
9. Add the chopped clams and the cream. Season with salt and pepper and the Tobasco and Worcestershire sauce. Bring to a simmer and serve.

THREE-WAY CORN CHOWDER



- crumbled (optional)
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley or one table-spoon dried

Directions

1. Melt the butter in a medium saucepan. Add onion and cook until tender, stirring frequently. Add the flour and stir to make a paste. Slowly add the chicken broth, stirring frequently with a whisk to avoid lumps.
2. Add the potatoes. Cover and cook for 10 minutes or until potatoes are barely tender.
3. Stir in the half and half and both cans of undrained corn. Cook uncovered for six to eight minutes. Stir in the ham or bacon (if you are using these) and the parsley. Reheat if necessary.

This corn chowder can be made three ways: with just corn, with ham, or with bacon.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 medium onion, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 15-ounce can chicken broth
- 2 cups cubed potatoes
- 2 cups half and half, or 1 cup milk and 1 cup cream
- 2 15-ounce cans corn, undrained or two cups cooked corn cut from the cob
- 1 1/2 cups diced ham (optional)
- 6 strips bacon, cooked to a crisp and

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COCONUT SHRIMP CHOWDER



The vegetables or seafood, the focal ingredient of the This is the This is an excellent chowder, one that will impress your friends. We used two pounds of shrimp; you could get by with 1 1/2 pounds. The coconut milk and spices make this a great Thai dish.

Ingredients

- 2 pounds uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 3 cups bottled clam juice
- 1 1/2 cups coconut milk
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin

- 1/2 teaspoon curry
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground ginger
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1/3 cup heavy cream
- cilantro

Directions

1. Chop the shrimp into 1/2 inch pieces. Set aside.
2. Mix the clam juice and coconut milk together in a heavy stockpot. Add the pepper, salt, garlic, cumin, curry, and ginger. Simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Add the cornstarch to a cup and then add a small amount of the soup dissolving it and stirring it with a spoon to make a paste. Add more liquid and stir until it is thinned to a sauce. Whisk the sauce back into the soup. Add the shrimp. Continue cooking until it starts to bubble and is smooth and thickened. The shrimp should have turned red. Add the cream.

Make any final adjustments to the soup, adding more seasoning or more thickening if needed. Garnish with cilantro.



MANHATTAN STYLE CLAM CHOWDER



This is a cousin to New England Style Clam Chowder. It has a tomato base instead of a cream sauce base.

This was a fun project. Tomatoes are tarter and have more flavor than cream sauce, so it takes more spices to complement and balance the tomato base. We used thyme, oregano, basil, and a touch of Tabasco.

This recipe calls for pureed fresh tomatoes, but you can substitute canned.

We have made this soup with (2) 6.5 ounce cans of chopped clams in place of the fresh clams.

Ingredients

- about one gallon of clams
- 2 1/2 cups water with 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 3 slices of bacon
- 3 tablespoons of butter
- 1 medium sweet onion, minced
- 1 stalk of celery, chopped
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 2/3 cups peeled, seeded, and diced and then pureed plum tomatoes
- 1 bay leaf

- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1 teaspoon basil
- 1 medium russet potato, peeled and diced into 1/2 inch cubes
- 1 teaspoon salt
- pepper as needed
- Tobasco sauce, a few drops as needed

Directions

1. Wash and prepare your clams as described in the "Caring for Your Clams" section on page 5. Steam the clams until they open. Discard any that do not open.
2. Pick the meat from the clams, chop them, and set the meat aside.
3. Strain the broth with a fine mesh sieve or cheesecloth and set aside.
4. In a large heavy pan, cook the bacon until crisp. Remove the bacon and chop into pieces. Pour out any bacon grease leaving a tablespoon or so in the pan.
5. Add the butter, onion, garlic, and celery and sauté until the vegetables are crisp-tender.
6. Add the flour and stir until you have paste that is just starting to brown.
7. Gradually add the clam broth—a little at a time--stirring to remove lumps until you have a smooth sauce. Add the rest of the broth.
8. Add the potatoes and bacon and cook until they are just tender. Skim any residue from the surface.
9. Add the chopped clams and the diced tomatoes. Season with salt and pepper, the other spices, and the Tobasco sauce. Bring to a simmer and serve.

WILD RICE, MUSHROOM, AND HAM (OR CHICKEN) SOUP



This is an outstanding soup, so good that you'll want to serve it often to your family and fancy enough to serve to guests. It's easy to make.

You can use either chicken or ham for this recipe. The picture at the right shows chicken, but both are good.

Ingredients

- 1 cup uncooked wild rice
- 1 large sweet onion, chopped
- 4 ounces fresh mushrooms, chopped or the equivalent in dry mushrooms
- 1 large carrot, grated
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch

- 2 14.5 ounce cans of chicken broth
- 2 cups cooked ham or chicken, diced
- 1/2 teaspoon thyme (if you use chicken)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt or to taste (salt will vary depending on broth used)
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 1 cup heavy cream
- water

Directions

1. Wash the wild rice, place it in a saucepan, cover it with water and simmer it on very low heat until the rice is tender but not mushy, about 45 minutes.
2. Sauté the chopped onion and carrot in the butter. Sprinkle the cornstarch over the butter and onion and stir to make a paste. Add a little of the broth and stir to further dissolve the cornstarch. Add the rest of the broth and heat to a boil to gelatinize the starch and thicken the soup.
3. Add the wild rice and ham or chicken. Add the sugar, salt, and thyme if any. Add the cream. Bring back to simmer but do not boil. Test for seasoning and serve.

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TANDOORI CLAM CHOWDER



- 1 medium russet potato, peeled and diced into 1/2 inch cubes
- 1 1/2 cups cream
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- 1 teaspoon Tandoori Masala or other spice
- salt and pepper as needed

Directions

1. Wash and prepare your clams as described in the "[Caring for Your Clams](#)" section on page 5. Steam the clams until they open. Discard any that do not open.
2. Pick the meat from the clams, chop them, and set the meat aside.
3. Strain the broth with a fine mesh sieve or cheesecloth and set aside.
4. In a large heavy pan, cook the bacon until crisp. Remove the bacon and chop it into pieces. Pour out any bacon grease leaving a tablespoon or so in the pan.
5. Add the butter, onion, garlic, and celery and sauté until crisp-tender.
6. Add the flour and stir until you have paste that is just starting to brown.
7. Gradually add the clam broth—a little at a time—stirring to remove lumps until you have a smooth sauce. Add the rest of the broth.
8. Add the potatoes and cook until they are just tender. Skim any residue from the surface.
9. Add the chopped clams, diced tomatoes, and the cream. Season with spices, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer and serve.

This is a cross between a New England and a Manhattan chowder. But with its creamy base, it's more of a New England chowder. It has chunks of fresh tomatoes, just enough to give it a nice fresh flavor.

We first made this without any spice and then sampled it with different spices to find the right combination. Tandoori Masala was perfect with just a touch of heat from the spice.

You can buy Tandoori Masala from us but you probably don't have any in your cupboard. You can try other spice blends. A good Italian spice blend is good. If you like curry, try that.

We have made this soup with (2) 6.5 ounce cans of chopped clams in place of the fresh clams.

Ingredients

- about one gallon of clams
- 1 cup salted water
- 3 slices of bacon
- 3 tablespoons of butter
- 1 medium sweet onion, minced
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 stalk of celery, chopped
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups peeled, seeded, and diced plum tomatoes

BAKED POTATO SOUP



One of our favorite restaurants makes baked potato soup every day. They scrub russet potatoes, rub them in bacon grease, wrap them in foil, and bake them. They hold them for no more than an hour and half and then relegate them into the “soup bin” from which they make their yummy baked potato soup. This is our version—with bacon and cheddar.

This is a creamy potato soup—a chowder—and topped with cheddar and bacon. This is one soup that everyone will like.

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 medium onion, chopped
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 15-ounce can chicken broth
- 1 12-ounce can evaporated milk

- 3 medium russet potatoes, baked and cooled
- 1/2 cup grated cheddar cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- pepper to taste
- 1/2 cup grated cheese (for garnish)
- 4 slices bacon, cooked crisp and snipped into pieces
- 3 tablespoons sliced green onions

Directions

1. Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and carrot and cook until soft, stirring occasionally.
2. Stir in flour. Gradually stir in broth and evaporated milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the mixture thickens and just comes to a boil.
3. Scoop the pulp from the potatoes and add to the soup. Cook again until thick.
4. Add the cheese, salt, and pepper and stir until the cheese is melted and the soup is thick.
5. Serve with grated cheese, bacon, and green onions on top.