

Easy-to-prepare meals and accompanying drinks

# Mussels With Cider And Smoky Bacon

BY RACHEL WALKER



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PEOPLE OFTEN THINK OF MUSSELS in terms of France's classic dish, moules-frites. But mussels have been cultivated in British waters for hundreds of years—seven million tons of them are farmed in Scotland alone. So it makes sense to showcase them alongside some more of Britain's best produce: cider, bacon, sage and English mustard. What delights!

Britain's mussel season comes to an end around the start of April, making them a wonderful early-spring dish, perfect for quick and cheap midweek suppers.

**Serves 2 as a main course,  
4 as a starter**

- A knob of butter
- 6 rashers of smoked back bacon, chopped
- 1kg mussels
- 180ml dry cider
- 1tsp English mustard
- 2tbsp of buttermilk or cream
- Salt
- Freshly ground pepper
- 4–6 sage leaves, finely sliced

- Sliced bread (cottage loaf or soda bread, to keep with the British theme!)
1. Before starting, scrupulously check the mussels. Chuck any with damaged or broken shells. If any of the shells are open, then gently tap the mussel on a hard surface—if the shell doesn't quickly close, then discard.
  2. Put the mussels in a big colander under a stream of water from the



3. cold tap, and give the shells a good scrub with a potato brush or scourer. Remove any of the fibrous "beards".
3. Heat the butter in a stock pot or large pan until it starts to foam. Add the bacon and cook until the fat starts to turn crispy.
4. Add the mussels to the pan and pour the cider on top. Put on the lid and cook for five minutes, giving the pan an occasional rough shake. After five minutes, the shells should be open, revealing plump orange nuggets of meat inside the shells.
5. Use a slotted spoon to divide the mussels between two or four pre-warmed bowls (depending on

whether it's a starter or main course). Add the buttermilk or cream and English mustard to the juices in the pan and season with salt and pepper to taste.

6. Ladle the sauce over the mussels and garnish with sliced sage. Serve with slices of bread to mop up the delicious juices.

## Did You Know...?

The Egyptian King Tutankhamun and many Roman emperors owned "sea-silk" cloaks, which were made from thread spun from mussel "beards".

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM & ZOE HILL

# A Slug Of Scrumpy To Flex Your Mussels

A RECENTLY-CONVERTED CIDER DRINKER will expect something very different to an old-school scrumpy drinker. The modern way is to pile ice into a glass and fill it with a light, fizzy cider. A scrumpy is a different beast though: room temperature, flat and ferociously alcoholic.

Scrumpy got a bad reputation by being associated with rough home-brews, but there are a lot of tasty and nuanced varieties available on the market, and it makes the perfect pairing with British mussels and bacon.



Old Rosie is a great place to start. It has an excitingly cloudy consistency and is a medium-dry option with deep earthy notes. Black Rat and Jack Ratt are two more great scrumpies, which will have you playing The Wurzels while raising a glass to the West Country.

■ **Old Rosie Cloudy Scrumpy Cider,**

Westons (7.3%),  
£1.99/500ml

■ **Vintage Cider, Sandford Orchards Devon Scrumpy** (7%), £56/20 litres (great for a party!)

■ **Jack Ratt Scrumpy Cider,** Lyme Bay Winery (5.6%), £4.25/litre



## AND JUST TO ADD AN EXTRA KICK...

If you're not scared of a bit of heat, then try a strong English mustard. Daylesford's Natural Strong English Mustard is admirably fiery. Wilkin & Sons Ltd and Tracklements also make excellent strong English varieties.

■ **Daylesford Natural Strong English Mustard,** £2.59/170g

■ **Wilkin & Sons Ltd Organic Hot English Mustard,** £2.09/185g

■ **Tracklements Strong English Mustard,** £2.20/140g



pudding  
of the  
Month



## Honey-Baked Rhubarb

Blush-pink rhubarb is a lovely reminder that spring is in full swing, although surprisingly it wasn't until the 19th century that Brits really started cooking with it. In 1824, strawberry producer Joseph Myatt persuaded people that if bitter rhubarb stalks were combined with something sweet (like strawberries!) then it was delicious. This recipe is great when mixed with yogurt and granola, or stirred into porridge. Alternatively, try serving it with vanilla or stem-ginger ice cream.

- 400g rhubarb
- 4tbsp runny honey
- Optional: cinnamon stick, star anise, grated root ginger, strips of orange zest.

1. Preheat the oven to 180C
2. Wash the rhubarb, trim the ends and cut into 4cm batons. Put these into a shallow dish, drizzle over the honey and add your choice of spices.
3. Cover with foil and bake for 20 minutes, until the rhubarb is tender but still holding its shape.
4. Remove spices and store in the fridge. ■

### BOOK



**The Great Food Collection (20 books),** £9.99, *The Book People*. Some of the best food writing across history.

### BARGAIN



Free lecture: **At Sea: A Portrait of a Scottish Fishing Community,** *National Maritime Museum, London, March 14 & 25*. Learn about the role women played in these communities. No booking required.

### BLOW-OUT



**Mussel Eaters, set of two,** £29.95, *John Lewis*.