Tips on serving a meal of lobster

By LESLEY PORCELLI

Lobster may be considered a delicacy, but cooking one requires only the most basic of techniques: boiling or steaming. An easy lobster meal can afford you the pleasure of sitting down with your guests this summer and enjoying the crustacean’s richly flavored meat and sweet, briny juices.

The home lobster boil begins at the fish market. Purchase lobsters within a day of when you plan to use them, and choose ones that are not only living but also lively. A 1½-pounder is an ample individual serving. Culls, which are missing one claw, are often less expensive and good for lobster salad.

If you don’t live near the North Atlantic — the American lobster’s habitat — consider searching the Internet for overnight delivery. Lobsters can be shipped just about anywhere for home cooking.

Store lobsters, with their claws banded, in the refrigerator until cooking time. Rest them on moist seaweed (if your market can provide some) or damp newspaper in an open bag.

Some diners prefer the more intense flavor that results from steaming, but boiling is the more traditional method. Since there is no telltale sign for doneness, always use a timer.

Serve lobsters on a table set with lemon wedges, melted butter, buns and plenty of napkins. Also provide tiny forks, nut picks and nutcrackers for your guests to get at the succulent meat.

Working on the segmented shells with bare hands and sucking every morsel out of every last leg is part of the fun.

Piling tender meat on a buttered, toasted bun for the classic New England lobster roll, though, is just as enjoyable. Whether in the shell or out, lobster is a welcome indulgence.

If your lobsters are larger than 1½ pounds, add 1 to 2 minutes per quarter pound to the cooking time. Let cooked lobsters stand until cool enough to handle, 6 to 8 minutes.

Boiled or Steamed Lobsters
Makes 4 servings
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons coarse or sea salt (for boiling only)
4 lobsters (1½ pounds each)

To boil: Fill a very large (4-gallon) stockpot three-quarters full with cold water. Bring to a rolling boil; add salt. Plunge lobsters, one at a time, headfirst into the water. Cook, uncovered, 12 to 14 minutes (from the time lobsters enter pot).

To steam: Fill a very large stockpot with a steaming basket (or use a round wire rack or an inverted metal colander). Fill pot with cold water just to reach bottom of basket. Cover; bring to a boil. Quickly set lobsters in one layer in pot (or cook in batches). Cook, covered, 15 to 17 minutes.

How to eat a lobster

Some people love the green liver, or tomalley, from the lobster’s carapace; mix it with lemon juice or butter and spread it on crackers.

Remove lobster from pot with tongs; let cool. If you like, snap the tips of claws and let liquid drain. Remove bands. Twist claws with their knuckles from the body. Separate knuckles from claws. Crack knuckles open; remove meat. Grasp the part of the claw that resembles a “thumb,” and bend it back to snap it off.

Crack claw in half below thumb with a nutcracker; remove meat.

Pull off legs; use a rolling pin to ease meat out of each, applying pressure from tip to base. Twist tail from the joint where it meets the body.

Pull off tail fins. Bend tail backward to crack off the end part of the shell.

Use your fingers to push tail meat out larger end; remove with a fork.

Serve lobsters with lemon wedges, melted butter, buns and plenty of napkins. Lobsters may be considered a delicacy, but cooking them requires only the most basic of techniques — boiling.

— Coarse or sea salt
— Freshly ground pepper
8 top-split hot-dog buns
1½ tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Stir together lobster meat and mayonnaise. Stir in herbs (if desired) and lemon juice; season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate, covered, while preparing rolls, or up to 2 hours.

Heat a large heavy skillet or griddle over medium heat until hot. Lightly brush the outside of buns with butter; transfer to skillet. Cook, turning once, until golden brown, about 1½ minutes per side.

Spoon about ¼ cup lobster mixture into each bun. Serve immediately.

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