

Perfect Pasta





Linguini with White Clam Sauce

By Chef Bob Skolnick Photography by Marty Snortum Studio

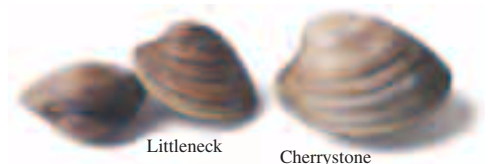
Fresh clams are the key to this dish. Typically you can find them in most quality grocery stores and specialty markets. Find out which day the supermarket receives their fresh seafood delivery and select your clams from the batch that has just arrived. For perfect linguini with white clam sauce, you must first learn the basics of handling and cooking clams.

SELECTING AND HANDLING THE FRESH CLAMS

Hard shell clams are sold alive, and should only be purchased completely shut. The liquid inside the clam surrounds the clam meat, which keeps it fresh. There are two sizes that are commonly used for this dish: one size is known as Littleneck, and are smaller (about 1 to 1½ inches across). The second size is Cherrystone, which are larger (about 2 to 3 inches across). When cooked, the meat in Littlenecks are typically very tender and can be eaten in one bite. The meat from Cherrystone clams tends to be a little tougher, and should be chopped before placing in the sauce. I recommend eight Littlenecks per person for this dish.

When you get home with your fresh clams, place them immediately in a plastic bag towards the

back of your refrigerator. They need to be washed before cooking, however I recommend saving this step until just before you are ready to cook them. Excessive handling particularly at room temperature may cause some or all of your clams to die and open before you cook them. Remember, they must be cooked while they are still alive.



*Southern New Mexico's
Premier Culinary
Experience*

**Picacho
Hills**
Country Club

Surprisingly Affordable.
For information on social, tennis,
full privilege memberships & guest policies
call the business office 505-523-8641

6861 Via Campestre
Las Cruces, NM 88007
www.picachohills.com

When you're ready to cook the clam sauce, scrub them one by one in cold clean water to wash off sand and any sea grasses. It is not necessary to submerge them for a prolonged period in water. Once cleaned, place the clams in a wide, flat sautoir (a sauté pan with straight sides, about 2 to 3 inches high) with a tight fitting cover. The flatter and wider cooking pan allows the clams to spread out while cooking, and provides them with the same level of heat simultaneously. For each dozen clams, add 4 ounces of preheated bottled clam juice to the pan. The cooking liquid should not totally cover the clams, as the intention is to steam them rather than poaching or boiling them. I like to throw in a few cloves of crushed fresh garlic into the steaming pot to give the clams a nice flavor and aroma. Place the cover on the pot so it is airtight. If you do not have a tight fitting cover use aluminum foil and mold around the edges of the pot. Place on high heat and steam the clams, which only takes a few minutes. After the liquid comes to a boil, reduce to a rolling simmer until all of the clams open. Have a plastic container with an airtight lid standing by. As the clams fully open, transfer them with a slotted spoon to the plastic container with a cup of the clam broth to keep the clams moist. Cover the container and set aside.



Next, take the clam broth left in the cooking pot and strain through a fine mesh strainer or cheesecloth. This is the base to your already-in-progress clam sauce.

COOKING THE LINGUINI

Select an imported linguini for this dish, about 8 ounces of dried pasta per person. Prepare a seasoned cooking liquid of mild chicken stock and garlic powder. Break the linguini in half so you have long, but manageable strands when cooked. Bring the cooking stock to a boil and add the dry linguini, stirring vigorously for the first few minutes to ensure the pasta separates and the strands cook individually. Cook the pasta until al dente and then drain in a colander. Cool the pasta slightly under running warm water, which will also rinse the starch off. Place in a large bowl and toss with olive oil to keep the warm pasta from sticking together. Set aside in a warm place until ready to serve, keeping the hot cooking stock for later use.

MAKING THE WHITE CLAM SAUCE

Select a wide bottom, heavy-duty pot in which to make the sauce. Place the olive oil in the bottom of your pot over a medium to high heat. When the oil is ready, a piece of garlic or diced onion dropped in the oil will start to sizzle and brown. Add the sliced garlic, and sauté until its starts to turn golden brown. At this point immediately add the diced onion to slow the cooking process of the garlic. Cook the onion until slightly browned, being careful not to burn the garlic. Add the remainder of the bottled clam juice, and bring to a low simmer. Next, add your strained clam broth (that you used to steam your clams open) to your sauce base. Add 3/4 of your chopped fresh oregano and chopped Italian parsley. Simmer on high for 3 minutes, adding Wondra flour to slightly thicken your sauce. A thicker sauce clings better to the pasta. Wisk the Wondra Flour into the simmering sauce slowly, constantly whisking. The sauce will thicken as it cooks, so be careful not to add too much thickening agent. If Wondra flour is not available, you can use cornstarch slurry, which is made by combining cornstarch and clam juice. When the sauce coats the back of the spoon, it's done. Because bottled

clam juice can sometimes be a little salty, add a small amount of hot water to cut the salt if necessary. Now that your sauce base is perfect, add the drained whole baby canned clams. Bring the sauce back to a simmer and add finely ground fresh black pepper to taste. Taste the sauce again and make any final seasoning adjustments. Now take your steamed Littleneck clams and gently place them (shell and clam together) in the sauce. Spoon the sauce into and over the opened Littleneck clams. You are now ready to serve.

TO SERVE YOUR LINGUINI AND CLAMS

Dip your cooked linguini back into the hot broth to bring it back up to temperature. Drain again in a colander, shaking off excess water. Place the drained linguini in a deep pasta bowl and spoon over some of the clam sauce (without the opened clams). Stir to coat the pasta with the sauce. Now place a spoonful or two of the whole baby clams from the sauce along with more sauce on the top of the pasta. Place the eight open Littleneck clams on top of the pasta. Finally, garnish with a little chopped fresh oregano and Italian Parsley. Serve with freshly grated Reggiano Parmesan cheese and hot crusty bread. Buen Provecho!

Linguini with White Clam Sauce

Serves 4

- 2 lbs imported linguini
- ½ gal chicken stock to cook pasta
- 32 Littleneck clams, fresh and alive
- 8 cloves fresh garlic, peeled and sliced
- 2 cups Spanish onion, finely diced
- 3 each 8 oz. bottled clam juice
- 2 each 10 oz. canned whole baby clams
- 1 pkg. fresh oregano (leaves removed and cut with sharp knife)
- 1 bunch fresh Italian parsley, chopped
- Wondra flour (or cornstarch)
- 12 oz grated Reggiano Parmesan cheese
- Fresh black pepper to taste
- Crusty French or Italian bread





1753 E. University Ave.
(505) 524-2850



The Authentic Italian Experience



Also visit **LORENZO'S CAFE**
at 741 N. Alameda Blvd.
Open M-F for lunch
505-524-2850

