

VALENTINE'S SPECIALS



Native Oysters, Rock Oysters, and Mussels, are the perfect addition to your menu for February's Valentine's dishes. Take a look at our top tips for storing these delicious shellfish appetisers.

Native & Rock Oysters

For both Native & Rock oysters there are wild and farmed populations. Both are purified by depuration in the same manner - to ready them for eating. Oysters are grown and harvested around the UK. Most are grown in the South, from the Thames Estuary round to Cornwall, but also as far North as Scotland and as far South as Jersey. Each growing area lends its own distinct flavour to the oysters, and the differences can be distinguished on tasting, much as with wine. Oysters are either grown on managed parts of the sea bed, loose, or in bags on trestles. Most Oystermen cultivate both types, but separately to allow ease of harvesting. Rock Oysters can be eaten all year round with the Native only to be eaten when there is an 'R' in the month. Outside of this they will be spawning.

How to store Oysters?

Oysters should be kept in the fridge or chiller but preferably away from any fans. Do not keep the oysters in anything airtight. Always store the oysters flat side up and keep them covered with a damp tea towel, or equivalent, to stop them drying out. Oysters should never be kept in fresh or melted ice water. Oysters open their shells slightly to breathe – this is normal and a sign of good health. Discard any whose shells do not close tightly when tapped or handled. If you hear a hollow sound when tapped, the oyster should be avoided.



Mussels



Mussels are produced in many areas around the UK, including Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and the South West of England. With the exception of Scottish cultivated mussels, most mussel beds, or ropes, are in-shore. Mussels are hugely seasonal, and spawn in the warm summer months. As a very good rule, the yield, survival rate, and general all round quality of UK Mussels, (like Native Oysters) are much better if the month has an 'R' in. Months without an 'R' are generally the spawning period for Mussels. Mussels feed on nutrients in the water. Typically, the mussels growing higher up the water column are larger than those lower down as there are more nutrients nearer the surface.

How to store Mussels?

On arrival, rinse the shellfish in cold water and allow to drain. Do not store shellfish in tap water as they will die. Once drained, transfer to preferably a metal or glass container as this will be colder than a plastic container. Place in the fridge and cover with a suitable, damp covering, to stop the shellfish drying out. The beard is the fibrous material growing from one end of the shell, and is used by the mussel to attach itself to others in the colony. Because the beard originates in the tissue of the live mussel, it should not be pulled off until just before cooking. Shellfish live in the sea – they do not live in a fridge - so the more they are looked after; the better they will keep!