

mussels stuffed with aromatic pilaff and pine nuts

In Istanbul, stuffed mussels are sold by street vendors around the Golden Horn, at the boat crossings over the Bosphorus, and in the main bazaars. In the fish restaurants, they are always served at room temperature as a popular *meze* dish.

16 large fresh mussels
 45–60ml/3–4 tbsp olive oil
 2–3 shallots, finely chopped
 30ml/2 tbsp pine nuts
 30ml/2 tbsp currants, soaked in warm water for 5–10 minutes and drained
 10ml/2 tsp ground cinnamon
 5ml/1 tsp ground allspice
 5–10ml/1–2 tsp sugar
 5–10ml/1–2 tsp tomato purée (paste)
 115g/4oz/generous ½ cup short grain or pudding rice, well rinsed and drained
 1 small bunch each of fresh flat leaf parsley, mint and dill, finely chopped
 salt and ground black pepper
 lemon wedges and fresh flat leaf parsley sprigs, to serve

SERVES 4

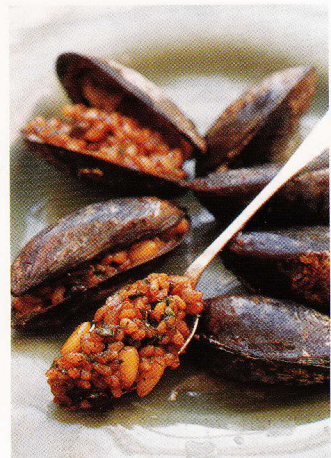
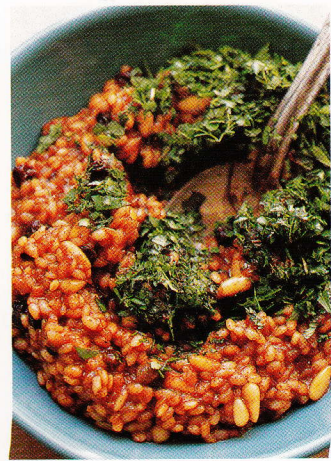
cleaning mussels Place the mussels in a bowl of cold water and scrub the shells with a stiff brush. Pull out the tough beards and cut off the barnacles with a knife. Discard any mussels that are open, or that do not close when tapped on the work surface.

1 Clean the mussels as described below. Keep them in a bowl of cold water while you prepare the stuffing.

2 Heat the oil in a heavy pan, stir in the shallots and cook until they soften. Add the pine nuts and currants, stir for 1–2 minutes until the pine nuts turn golden and the currants plump up, then stir in the cinnamon, allspice, sugar and tomato purée. Now add the rice, and stir until it is well coated.

3 Pour in enough water to just cover the rice. Season with salt and pepper and bring to the boil. Lower the heat, partially cover the pan and simmer for 10–12 minutes, until all the water has been absorbed. Tip the rice on to a plate, leave to cool, then toss in the herbs.

4 Using a sharp knife, prise open each mussel shell wide enough to fill with rice. Stuff a spoonful of rice into each shell, then close the shells and pack the mussels tightly into a steamer filled with water. Cover with a sheet of dampened baking parchment, put a plate on top and weigh it down with a stone – one from the garden will do – to prevent the mussels from opening during steaming.



5 Place the lid on the steamer and bring the water to the boil. Lower the heat and steam the mussels gently for 15–20 minutes, then leave to cool a little in the pan.

6 Serve warm on a bed of parsley, with lemon wedges for squeezing.