

Steamed Mussels with Parsley, Garlic, Celery & Ouzo

Mussels are at their peak in the winter and into early spring. Mussels are a good source of both omega-3 fats and zinc which help boost our immune function. I continue to see fresh mussels for sale in grocery stores, and if you do not see them fresh, you can thaw frozen mussels and use them instead.

In Greece and Cyprus, ouzo is a dry anise-flavored aperitif that is widely consumed (sometimes diluted with a little water, poured over ice, and sometimes served straight). You often need to visit a liquor store to find it—at least in Florida they are keeping liquor stores open during the COVID-19 pandemic as essential businesses. The ouzo adds a lovely flavor to this easy-to-prepare dish, and you could substitute other liquors for ouzo although that will change the flavor substantially. Even though you use ouzo with alcohol in the preparation, the dish itself will be essentially alcohol-free as the alcohol evaporates with cooking and steaming.

Alternatively, you can also add onions, carrots, and baby potatoes to the celery if you want to turn this dish into a full meal without the need for a vegetable side dish.

Prep Time: 15 Minutes **Serves:** 2

Ingredients:

2.5 pounds live mussels
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 medium celery stalks, chopped (include green tops if available)
¼ cup lemon juice (juice of 1 lemon)
¼ cup ouzo
4 medium garlic cloves, minced
½ cup parsley, chopped

Directions:

Immediately prior to cooking, scrub mussels and remove the beard (any brown fibers emerging from the shell) with your fingers, or use pliers if needed. Rinse and drain. If any mussels do not close fully, discard them.

Heat a large pot, to medium heat, add olive oil, then celery, and sauté for 2 minutes with an occasional stir until celery starts to soften. Add lemon juice, ouzo, and bring to a gentle boil.

Add mussels, cover the pot, and steam for 3 minutes until they just begin to open. Sprinkle the garlic and half the parsley over the mussels, close the lid, and steam another 2 minutes.

Next stir the pot with a large spoon, then add remaining parsley, cover, and steam a final 2-3 minutes, until nearly all the mussels have opened. (If there are a few mussels that do not open in the end, discard them.)

Remove from heat, stir again one last time, and serve in bowls immediately, with an extra bowl for empty shells once eaten.

Enjoy,

Steven Masley, MD