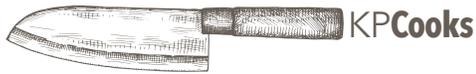


Mom's Fried Razor Clams



by Brad Sherman
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When I was young, say about 65 years ago, our family enjoyed digging for razor clams on Washington's beaches every time the tide was sufficiently low. In those days there were perhaps 30 brave souls populating the beach and the shallow frigid surf at 4 a.m. in search of the delectable mollusks. I remember as we approached the beach, the lanterns and flashlights of our fellow clammers would give off an otherworldly glow as they floated by like giant, slow moving fireflies, the light bouncing off the wet sand, diffused by the morning mist.

And so, the four of us intrepid, shivering, often whining children would venture with our parents to gather our bounty for a feast. It was usually pretty miserable at the start but always ended joyously.

Everything was different in those days. The clams had a chance. No clam guns, just a shovel. We would spot a siphon hole in the sand and start digging furiously from about eight inches away to make sure we didn't damage the clam. After digging down a foot or so from all sides, we would dive in with our hands, furiously excavating deeper and scooping away the water as it quickly backfilled our efforts. Then, if we were lucky, we would feel the clam shell.

The advantage constantly shifted from clam to digger and back again, and the clams would often prevail. They have nature on their side. As you are up to your armpits in wet sand, the tide rolls in and time runs out. If they can resist your pulling for long enough, the next wave will cover and deter all but the most devoted clammers.

Which brings me to my mother. She would never give up on getting her clam even as the tide covered her. She was tough, and my god that water was cold. We howled with laughter as she was nearly submerged by incoming water, her face smashed against the sand and her right arm as far down the hole as she could reach. Then we cheered as she rose triumphantly, drenched with saltwater, seaweed and sand, smiling as she held up a clam that was maybe three inches long. Oh, what fun we had!

Then we would clean the clams. This took seemingly forever because with six of us and a limit that was somewhere around 26 (not sure about the exact number), we are talking about a lot of clams. Then we would eat. And eat. Of course, when you dig clams, you have to keep all sizes, so many of them were actually very small, but still, we are talking about major gluttony here. They were oh so good!

The following is mom's recipe as I remember it and as I have tried to replicate many times.

MOM'S FRIED CLAMS

To feed four hungry people or serve as a nice appetizer for more.

Ingredients

2 pounds shelled razor clams. Save nectar for chowder and remove excess moisture with paper towels

1 cup flour

1 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon cornstarch

½ teaspoon paprika (sweet, not smoked)

⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper or to taste

½ teaspoon black pepper or to taste

1 teaspoon onion powder

3 eggs, beaten

2 cups panko bread crumbs. Mom used crushed saltine crackers but panko gives extra crispiness.

3 tablespoons canola oil plus 3 tablespoons unsalted butter for frying, or more as needed

Steps

Heat oven to warm or lowest setting. Put a paper towel-lined cookie sheet in oven.

Thoroughly mix dry ingredients 2-8 in a plastic or paper bag. Add clams and give the bag a good shake to coat.

Beat eggs in a wide, shallow bowl.

Put a large frying pan on medium high heat. Add oil and butter.

When oil and butter are hot but not smoking, dip clams, one at a time, into beaten eggs then drop into panko and coat completely, then carefully place into pan. Repeat until pan is full but do not crowd.

Cook clams just until they are a nice golden brown, then flip. It's usually about three or four minutes per side. Try not to disturb until ready to flip.

Lightly salt cooked clams and place on cookie sheet in warm oven. Good quality sea salt makes a difference here. I use Maldon Sea Salt Flakes.

Repeat until all are cooked. Serve with a slice of lemon, crusty bread, a nice salad like Caesar or better yet, homemade coleslaw, maybe some wine or beer, and enjoy with family and friends.