

OYSTERS, YUMMY LITTLE BEASTIES



OK, so you've never tried a raw oyster. Well it's high time you tasted one! You are missing one of the most transporting experiences a person can have. If the oyster is cold, briny and moist, you can close your eyes and you would swear that you are on the beach, with the wind in your hair, salt air in your lungs and a smile on your face.

What about getting a bad one? Aren't they slimy? Will they taste fishy?

First, there are almost no bad ones any more. Farming techniques have become so good and quality control so tight, that a bad one is a rare thing indeed, and usually caught by the shucker, long before it hits the table. Farmed you say? Yep, most of the oysters we eat today are farmed. Wild is so yesterday, the future is farming.

Are they slimy? No, not at all. No slime involved. Clean and salty.

No fishy taste. They will taste of the place they were grown, in brackish water or in an open estuary, the colder the water, the saltier the oyster.

There are lots of different kinds of oysters, West Coast, East Coast, European, Japanese, Australian. How do you choose?

Here on the West Coast, you will mostly be eating the Gigas species, originally from Japan, but now grown all the way from British Columbia to California, and each named after the place they were farmed.

On the East Coast and in the Gulf of Mexico, the Virginica species is king, while in Europe, the Edulis, or European Flat is most popular, although Gigas, which grows faster, is gaining a foothold.

There are a couple of special guys, like the Kumamoto, small, deep-cupped and delicious and the Olympia, the only oyster native to the West Coast, when full grown is only about the size of your thumb nail. If you run across either of these oysters, you should suck 'em up.

Learning about oysters is fun, with lots of hands on experiences required, with many different beverages to pair with, from sake to beer to dry white wines, sparklers and even Single Malt Scotch. So get to it! Don't put it off any longer, get slurping!

Alan Irvine,
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