

PACIFIC OYSTER

AREA OF ORIGIN AND RANGE OF AVAILABILITY: Originally from Japan, the Pacific oyster is now the most widely cultured oyster in the world, harvested predominantly in the Pacific Ocean.

HARVEST VOLUME: The average annual production in British Columbia is approximately 5,500 tonnes. In 2001, however, 7,300 tonnes were harvested.

HARVEST/CULTIVATION METHOD: While some wild oyster beds exist in British Columbia, virtually all of the commercial Pacific oyster harvest in British Columbia is farmed. There are three main aquaculture techniques used. The first is off-bottom culture, in which floating longlines, rafts and fences are used. In this method, the oyster growers string cultch (material that oysters attach themselves to) onto wire or nylon rope and suspend it above the bottom of the ocean in time to collect setting larvae. The oysters are then grown in suspension until they attain the desired length. Once separated from the cultch, the oysters are either planted on the ocean bottom or placed on trays suspended in the water to strengthen their shells. Another cultivation method is bottom culture, in which natural spat (young oyster seed), hatchery seed or sets are used. A third method uses large-scale floating nurseries called FLUPSYS. These floating upwelling systems can accommodate 10 million or more single oyster seed in screened bins straddling a raceway.

PROCESSING METHOD: After being harvested by hand or machine from only approved areas, the oysters are culled to return undersized oysters and old shells to the beds. In registered processing plants the oysters are then cleaned, graded and packed for shipping.

MARKETS: Approximately 80% of Pacific oysters are exported to the United States and Asia.

SUSTAINABILITY: In recognition that shellfish farming is an environmentally sustainable activity with the potential to create significant economic opportunities for British Columbian residents, the BC provincial government ended a decade-long moratorium on new tenures with the introduction of the **SHELLFISH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE**. The government together with shellfish farmers and other industry members are in the process of developing a set of mandatory operational standards. In addition, a detailed planning process is part of this initiative whereby coastal communities, First Nations communities, government and the shellfish industry are working together to determine the most appropriate sites for shellfish aquaculture within each community and to strike a balance between the potentially competing resource uses of the British Columbian coast.

The British Columbia Shellfish Growers Association in 2001 also developed an **ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND CODE OF PRACTICE** to foster and develop a public attitude of commitment of working with shellfish farmers in protecting and enhancing marine resources.

HISTORICAL AND ANECDOTAL INFORMATION: Oysters have a long history of nourishing the human race and being perceived as an aphrodisiac as the Romans were noted to enthusiastically eat them 2,000 years ago. It is likely that oysters were the first sea animal to be transported from one area to another and cultivated as food. The Pacific oyster fishery started in British Columbia in the 1920s when seed from Japan was first introduced into west coast waters. It is now the most widely cultivated oyster in British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest.

Recipe

KAREN BARNABY OF

THE FISH HOUSE (IN STANLEY PARK) VANCOUVER, BC

Presents: OYSTER PIE (Serves 4)

1/2 lb	fresh spinach, stems removed, washed	250 g
2 Tbsp	unsalted butter	30 mL
1 cup	finely diced onion	250 mL
1/2 cup	finely diced fennel bulb	125 mL
1 cup	dry white wine	250 mL
2 cups	whip cream	500 mL
1 tsp	salt	5 mL
2 tsp	finely chopped fresh tarragon	10 mL
1 Tbsp	fresh lemon juice	15 mL
2 lbs	russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 inch (2.5 cm) chunks	1 kg
1/2 cup	buttermilk, warmed	125 mL
2 Tbsp	unsalted butter at room temperature	30 mL
1 Tbsp	prepared horseradish	15 mL
	salt & pepper, to taste	
24	shucked medium oysters	24
1/2 cup	fine dry breadcrumbs	125 mL
	paprika	

1. In a large pot, steam the spinach for 3 to 5 minutes (until slightly wilted) using only the water clinging to its leaves. Drain and place on a plate to cool. When cool, squeeze the water out of the spinach and chop coarsely.
2. In a large pot melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onion and fennel and sauté until the onion is translucent. Add the white wine, turn the heat to high and boil until the wine is reduced by half. Add the whipping cream and boil until the mixture is reduced to 1 1/2 cups (375 mL). Stir in the salt, tarragon and lemon juice. Remove from heat.
3. In a large pot, cover the potatoes with water, bring to a boil and cook until the potatoes are very tender, about 15 to 20 minutes. Drain and return to the pot. Mash the potatoes until smooth. Beat in the buttermilk, then the butter and horseradish. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Preheat the oven to 425° F (220° C). Place the oysters in an 8" by 8" square (20 cm by 20 cm) baking dish and sprinkle with the breadcrumbs. Stir the spinach into the sauce and pour over the oysters. Spoon the mashed potatoes over the sauce and sprinkle lightly with paprika. Place in the oven and bake for 20 to 30 minutes, until the mixture is bubbling and the potatoes are lightly browned.