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# Flex those mussels

**TUCK INTO THE SCRUMPTIOUS SHELLFISH ALL YEAR ROUND TO SAVOUR DIFFERENT FLAVOURS**

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**C**HEAP as chips and often gobbled down with haste on "all you can eat" pub nights, mussels are sometimes dismissed as the poor man's shellfish. But their bargain-basement price of between \$5kg and \$12kg is no reflection of this misunderstood mollusc's virtue, with culinary and marine experts likening their flavour complexity to that of fine wine.

Just as the French term *terroir* describes the relationship between a grape's origin and the flavour, texture and aroma of a fine wine, a more recently coined term, "merroir" describes the local conditions that impact on the varying flavours of seafood.

And the humble mussel punches above its weight in demonstrating its distinct merroir, with the filter-feeder heavily influenced by its surrounding flora and fauna, along with currents and temperatures.

The taste of a mussel is also reliant on the health of local waterways, including salinity and mineral levels. "If you think of coastal waterways as a melting pot – a place where everything that happens on land combines with complex underwater ecosystems – the effect of this merroir on flavour should be no more surprising than terroir is in wine," says Sascha Rust, manager of the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS).

As the temperature dips, not only is a steaming pot of mussels a delicious way to warm the belly, it's also the time to enjoy them at their best, says fifth-generation mussel farmer Andrew Puglisi.

"During the cooler months of the year, our mussels will taste notably sweeter and are larger in meat size," says Puglisi, director of South Australia's Eyre Peninsula Seafoods.

"Different times of the year



Eyre Peninsula Seafoods CEO Mark Andrews with the company's director Andrew Puglisi.

produce different currents or eddies, tidal flows and sea temperatures which determine mussel flavour."

Since mussels are the grape's spirit animal regarding their terroir-merroir connection, it follows that their ideal wine pairing varies depending on their distinct

characteristics. Savoury, dry wines are a perfect match for the cool season's sweeter mussels, with chef and Eyre Peninsula Seafoods manager Richard Longden suggesting a pinot grigio or chardonnay.

He also recommends restraint in

cooking flavours to allow their natural sweetness to sing. "There is no need to smother them in loads of sauce or wine," Longden says.

"The best cooking method is to simply steam them with some garlic, olive oil and parsley in the saucepan."



## GARLIC MUSSELS WITH OLIVE OIL AND PARSLEY

SERVES 2. PREP 10 MINS. COOK 7 MINS

### INGREDIENTS

- 1kg fresh live mussels
- 200ml olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- pepper and salt
- handful of parsley, finely chopped

### METHOD

- 1 Steam mussels until cooked, half shell them and set aside for later.
- 2 Add olive oil into a large fry pan or wok and heat.
- 3 Fry chopped garlic in the pan for 1 minute.
- 4 Add a handful of parsley and heat through.
- 5 Season to taste.
- 6 Add half-shelled mussels and heat through. Can also be prepared in advance and enjoyed cold.

Recipe supplied by Eyre Peninsula Seafoods



## HOT AND SPICY CHILLI MUSSELS

SERVES 2. PREP 10 MINS. COOK 10 MINS.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1kg fresh live mussels
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1 red chilli, diced
- 1 tbs vegetable oil
- 3 tbs sweet chilli sauce
- 1 lime, cut into wedges
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 chopped tomatoes
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 red capsicum, chopped
- coriander, to garnish

### METHOD

- 1 Heat oil in a large pot.
- 2 Add onion and garlic and saute for 5 mins.
- 3 Add tomatoes, chilli, capsicum and wine.
- 4 Bring to the boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 mins.
- 5 Increase heat and add sweet chilli sauce and drained mussels.
- 6 Place lid on pot and cook for approximately 5 mins.
- 7 Garnish with coriander and lime and serve.

Recipe supplied by Eyre Peninsula Seafoods

## BARBECUE MUSSELS WITH GREMOLATA

SERVES 2. PREP 15 MINS. COOK 5 MINS.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1kg fresh mussels
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 cup of flat leaf parsley, chopped
- 1 lemon
- 2 tbs extra virgin olive oil
- black pepper

### METHOD

- 1 Heat up the barbecue to high heat with the lid on.
- 2 Drain off the water from the mussels, give the mussels a quick rinse.
- 3 Dice the garlic, zest the lemon and then juice the lemon.
- 4 To make the gremolata, mix the parsley, olive oil, lemon juice

and lemon zest. Leave for at least 10 minutes to infuse.

5 Place the whole mussels onto the BBQ, spread them out so they all have direct contact with the heat.

6 Replace the lid so the mussels steam in their juices but every minute turn them over and move them around until they are all open and cooked. This will take about 5 minutes.

7 Place in a bowl and remove one side of the shell and place the half-shell mussels on a tray.

8 Spoon the gremolata onto every mussel.

9 Season with freshly ground black pepper and serve.

Recipe supplied by Eyre Peninsula Seafoods

