

Shellfish – How to Handle It

From mussels to clams to oysters, shellfish is enjoyed by many people each and every single day around the world. Whether it's eaten in a white table cloth restaurant or purchased at a local grocery store, people have become very familiar with a wide variety of shellfish. However, not many people know the exact way to handle these fine delicacies of the sea. This is very important especially when some shellfish such as fresh oysters are eaten raw. Like many other perishable foods, proper handling is the key to avoiding spoilage or even food poisoning.

Keys to Safe Handling & Storage

- Visually inspect the shellfish to see if they are broken or open upon delivery. If broken or open it may indicate old age or spoilage.
- Smell the shellfish. If a rancid odour exists, the shellfish may be spoiled.
- Keep at an appropriate temperature between 1 to 4 °C. Temperature is the single most important control one has in keeping the shellfish safe for consumption.
- If keeping the shellfish in a refrigerator or a small cooler where the temperature can fluctuate with the door opening, place a wet cloth on the shellfish with ice on top of it. If the ice melts, drain the water and place more ice on the shellfish. Removing the melted ice will prevent the shellfish from having a rancid odour and eventually spoiling.
- If shellfish arrive in a plastic bag do NOT keep the bag tied or closed. Allow air to circulate since the shellfish are still alive.
- Do NOT keep shellfish in fresh water as they will die and spoil in a very short amount of time.
- Shellfish should be kept 4-5 days at most when delivered by your seafood supplier to your food establishment.

Signs of Spoilage

- The shellfish are broken and damaged.
- The shellfish are open may indicate spoilage. However, if shellfish are open lightly hold the shell closed together for a couple of seconds. If the shellfish remains closed when released, they are still alive. Shellfish may open with temperature or humidity changes but remain live and are safe to use.
- The shellfish have a rancid odour. It is true that all shellfish and fish for that matter do have a unique, fresh odour to them. However, if the odour is one that is ammonia or oil like that the average person can not bear, then most likely the shellfish is in fact spoiled.

Cooking Shellfish

- Scrub and clean the shellfish before cooking. Try to get rid of any sand or dirt that may exist on the shellfish.
- Shellfish should be cooked until the shells open up. Once they open up, keep them cooking for an extra 3-5 minutes. Depending on the size and quantity, a general guideline is 7-15 minutes total cooking time.
- Discard any unopened shellfish as these ones did not cook properly. The majority of them should be open.
- Add flavours and spices to preference.

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