



Perry Jackson

Super, sexy scallops

3 chefs' secrets to preparing the perfect (sensual) scallop dish

by Sandra Phinney

There is nothing more sensual than hearing the soft moan and the absolute look of pleasure on a woman's face (or a man's, for that matter) as she bites into a perfectly cooked scallop, and experiences the soft texture and exquisite taste on the palate. It's not necessarily meant for the bedroom," says executive chef Dale Nichols, "but it could lead to kitchen sex when all the stars align at the same time."

Nichols heads the culinary team at Digby Pines Golf Resort and Spa in Digby, NS, and he loves telling guests the story of how he fell in love with scallops. It happened in the late '70s, when he was a student at Acadia University. The yet-to-be-chef went on a scuba diving expedition in Sheet Harbour, NS, with three buddies, in search of scallops. After buying licences for a dollar—which allowed them 100 scallops each—they headed to the ocean. "After an hour and a half of carefully picking scallops, our dive bag looked like the Grinch's bag after he cleaned out Whoville," says Nichols. The loot was 396 scallops; after shucking for two hours, they netted about 23 kilograms (50 pounds) of meat.

"We traveled back to Acadia—victors in our own right—and in the small university dorm lounge, fried up the freshest scallops money can't buy, and ate them with toasted and buttered English muffins."

Although Nichols has since prepared thousands scallops over the past 30 years, he's never forgotten the taste and smell of cooking that first batch, "in a primitive Teflon frying pan, on a two-burner electric element, seasoned only with salt and pepper and washed down with some ice cold beer. Glorious. I can still taste them."



Sandra Phinney

◀ Panko Scallops

Courtesy Alan Crosby, White Point Beach Resort, Liverpool, NS

Scallops

- 1 cup (250 mL) flour
salt and pepper to taste
- 12 10/20 count scallops,
adductor muscle removed
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups (500 mL) fine panko
bread crumbs
- 2 cups (500 mL) canola oil

Cucumber Wasabi Cream (simple version)

- ½ cup (125 mL) creamy cucumber
dressing
- 1 tsp (5 mL) wasabi powder
or paste

Combine flour and salt and pepper. Roll scallops in seasoned flour; dip into egg to coat, then coat completely in panko crumbs. (If preparing in advance, sprinkle some extra crumbs over the scallops to keep the breading from getting soggy.)

In a medium skillet, heat oil to medium heat (test with a few bread crumbs; if they brown immediately, heat is good). Fry scallops for 1-2 minutes per side, until golden. Alternatively, scallops can be cooked in a small deep fryer for about 1½ minutes.

Prepare simple Cucumber Wasabi Cream by combining cucumber dressing and wasabi. Serve on the side with scallops. Makes 4 appetizer-sized servings.

Now, Nichols and his team prepare 70-90 kilograms (150-200 pounds) of scallops a week. His advice? "Don't over-season. God didn't create scallops so man could try to re-create them. Enjoy their delicate flavour married with a complementary condiment or subtle sauce. And, when you're buying them, look for scallops that have some spring in their step. Make sure they stand tall and perky."

For storage, he recommends placing them in a sealed container on a layer of paper towel, or on a rack, so any juice that drips out will settle below, and the scallop won't sit in liquid and get soggy.

As an afterthought, he adds, "Scallops are best eaten fresh—so why store them at all? Cook them immediately!"



Lot 30

▲ Wild Mushroom Risotto with Pan Seared Digby Scallops

Courtesy Dale Nichols, Digby Pines Golf Resort and Spa, Digby, NS

- 5 shallots, finely chopped
- 5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 3 cups (750 mL) chopped mixed wild mushrooms (shitake, oyster, portabella, button)
- ½ cup (125 mL) white wine
- 2 cups (500 mL) arborio rice
- salt and pepper
- 8 cups (2 L) vegetable stock, heated
- ½ cup (125 mL) grated Parmesan cheese
- 6 tbsp (90 mL) unsalted butter
- 2 tsp (30 mL) canola oil
- 48 large Digby scallops

In a large saucepan, lightly sauté the shallots and garlic until cooked through; add mushrooms and cook until soft, about 4-5 minutes. Add white wine and reduce until there is not much left in the pan.

Add rice to the cooked shallot and mushrooms. Season with salt and pepper; stir for 1 minute. Over medium heat, add stock, a bit at a time, and stir until liquid is absorbed. Continue to add stock and stir until the rice has a firm al dente texture, about 8-10 minutes. Finish with Parmesan cheese and unsalted butter; adjust seasoning.

Season scallops lightly with salt and pepper; in a medium skillet, heat oil until it shimmers. Fry scallops over high heat, searing one side until golden; turn briefly to sear the other side. Serve immediately with the risotto. Makes 8 servings.

Tip: Do not allow the rice to boil; let the stock absorb slowly, to maintain the integrity of the rice kernel.

▲ Curried Pistachio Scallop Gratin

Courtesy Gordon Bailey, Lot 30, Charlottetown

Béarnaise Sauce

- 4 egg yolks
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) white wine
- ¼ cup (50 mL) unsalted clarified butter
- 1 sprig chopped tarragon
- dash Worcestershire sauce
- dash Tabasco sauce
- juice from ½ lemon
- salt and pepper to taste

Carrot Butter

- 4-6 large carrots, peeled
- ¼ cup (50 mL) white wine vinegar
- 4 tbsp (60 mL) cold unsalted butter

Pistachios

- ¼ cup (50 mL) shelled pistachios
- 1 tsp (5 mL) olive oil
- 1 pinch curry powder

3 chefs' tips for preparing scallops

- **Alan Crosby**, Executive Chef, White Point Beach Resort, Liverpool, NS: "One of my favorite things is a perfectly seared scallop, cooked on one side only—mahogany brown, crispy—with a centre that's barely warm, a sprinkle of salt and a crack of pepper. If you're pan-frying, dry them thoroughly. Get your pan so hot they scream when you put them in—but don't overcook them. They should be slightly translucent in the centre."
- **Stefan Müller**, Executive Chef, Delta Beausejour, Moncton: "Bay of Fundy scallops have a beautiful texture and are very versatile. You can add different flavours and garnishes, or enjoy them simply as they come from the shell. You can also use frozen scallops as long as they are IQF scallops (individually quick frozen), because they don't shrink before cooking. But never defrost scallops on the counter or under running water; always defrost them in the refrigerator."
- **Gordon Bailey**, Executive Chef and Owner, Lot 30, Charlottetown: "Scallops are the sweetest thing from the sea, and one of the easiest things to cook. But you've got to have a heavy bottomed pan. Add a little canola oil. Make sure you pat your scallops until they are really dry. They should be 10/20 count, meaning that there are 10 to 20 scallops per pound. Season with a little salt, and place them in the hot pan until there's a nice crust—about 45 seconds. Add a little knob of butter on top of each one, flip and cook for another 10 seconds. Done! If you cook scallops this way, you'll be in love with them forever."



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