



Manhattan Clam Stuffed Tomatoes

Makes about 24 pieces; Serves 8-12 as appetizer or first course

In the war of chowders, most people are passionate as to their preference for the red (Manhattan) version or the white (New England). I love trying to convince New England-style lovers to come to the Manhattan side with these tasty little bites of chowder... in a bite size tomato "bowl." I've changed the minds of quite a few nay-sayers! If your tomatoes are small be sure to buy extras and use a whole tomato in place of a half. A small melon baller makes quick work of the preparation.

Ingredients:

24 large cherry tomatoes (or baby Roma tomatoes)
1 tablespoon coarse salt
1/4 cup olive oil for brushing, divided
1 medium baking potato, steamed until soft (about 15 - 20 minutes), peeled and put through a food mill or potato ricer using a coarse grain or large setting to yield about 3/4 cup (alternatively chop the steamed and peeled potato to a small (1/4-inch) dice)
25-50 littleneck clams, scrubbed and rinsed (depending on preference for clam flavor)
1/4 cup dry white wine
8-10 slices of pancetta, chopped (about 1/4 cup chopped)
1 small Vidalia (or other sweet variety) onion, chopped fine (about 1/2 cup)
1 small red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded and chopped fine (about 1/4 cup)
1 small carrot, peeled and minced
1 small rib of celery, trimmed and minced
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon dried red pepper flakes
Sea salt and coarse ground pepper, to season
2 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley leaves, to garnish

Preparation:

Cut the top off of each tomato. Core and seed each (remove a sliver off the bottom to help the tomato stand upright). Sprinkle the tomatoes with salt and place upside down on several layers of paper towels; let stand to remove excess moisture, about 30 minutes. Use additional paper towels to gently pat dry the inside of each tomato. Arrange tomatoes in single layer on a foil-lined large rimmed baking sheet. Brush the top cut edges of tomatoes with about 2 tablespoons of olive oil. While the tomatoes are draining, prepare the potato (as noted).

Bring 1/2 cup of water and the wine to a boil in large saucepan or stock pot over high heat. Add the clams and cover to steam for about 5 minutes, or until clams open. Transfer the clams to a large bowl discarding any that are cracked or have not opened. When cool enough to handle, remove the clam meat holding the clams over a bowl to catch any juices. Discard the shells. Chop the clams to a fine dice. Pour

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any collected clam juice over the clams (take care to notice whether there is any sediment in the juice and sieve the juice, if necessary). Set aside.

Position the oven rack to the upper third of the oven and preheat to 375° F. Line the bottom of a large rimmed-baking sheet with foil.

Place the pancetta in a medium-size skillet over medium-low heat. Sauté the pancetta until the fat renders and the pancetta crisps, about 5 minutes. Add the onion, pepper, carrot, and celery tossing to coat in the rendered fat. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook until softened, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic, oregano, and red pepper flakes. Add the diced clam meat to the pan with the juices and toss to combine. Sauté until fragrant and the clam juice is evaporated, about 1 minute more.

Pour the clam and vegetable mixture into a bowl with the potato. Fold into the potato until well-combined. Mound the potato mixture into the tomatoes; gently brush the tops of the filled tomatoes with the remaining olive oil. Bake about 10 minutes, or until tops are golden brown and crisp. Serve immediately

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