

## Gone Clamming

Since 1970, Dr. John Kallas, director of Wild Food Adventures, has led field trips to forage for foods like stinging nettles, elderberries, and fiddlehead ferns. These wild edibles can be found in and around Portland, on Sauvie's Island, in Forest Park, and amidst urban neighborhoods. His coastal trips take participants in search of various types of clams, mussels, and sea plants that linger close to shore, free for the taking.

Last weekend I set out with a few friends on one of Kallas's coastal trips to dig up cockle clams. Our mission to Netarts Bay near Tillamook, Oregon turned into an adventure when we discovered that the sands had shifted and we were trudging through waste-high water, then slopping through "quick" mud—at one point I was buried up to my knees. As Kallas repeatedly exclaimed, "It's all in a day's adventure."

Once we reached the sand bar that's exposed at low tide, the mother load was buried just a few inches below. At first we used garden rakes to blindly comb the ground, and then Kallas let us in on the secret of the "reveals." Cockles give themselves up by producing small air holes in the sand. When a reveal site is spotted, it is easy to dig them up with just an index finger.

We quickly reached our legal limit of 20 cockles, and it was time to trek back to Portland, clams on ice, for a cook off. My friends and I had 60 clams to deal with and a flood of recipe ideas. First we removed the meat from the shells by prying an old paring knife in to disconnect the clams' two abductor muscles, loosening their tight clamp. The live clams have a digestive track full of seaweed that we removed before lightly pounding them with a meat mallet and pan frying them in one preparation. In another, we sautéed the clam meat in white wine and garlic with English peas then tossed in capellini pasta.

Kallas recommends cockles for clam chowder because their meat is supposedly chewier than other clams. On the contrary, we found the meat rather toothsome with an extraordinarily sweet taste, which can only be found when they are that fresh. Perhaps it was the sweetness of the experience, too, of gathering food and preparing it, that aided in our perception of the meal.

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