OYSTER STUFFING
—as versatile and imaginative as the cook!
Sandra E. Shumway

Stuffings - seasoned mixture used to stuff food - were originally ‘invented’ as a means of ‘stretching and improving’ a fowl or other meat, i.e. making a small amount of meat go further with the added benefit of embellished flavor. In the case of chickens and turkeys, they also provide padding to help the bird maintain its shape during cooking. As Master Chef Louis P. DeGouy once noted, stuffings are ‘toothsome successes only if the seasoning is wisely done’. The recipe below adheres to this advice by providing subtle flavoring to be infused into foods being stuffed.

Everybody has their favorite recipes, many handed down for generations, and recipes for oyster stuffing seem to be particularly prone to individual preferences. Nearly all include bread crumps. My mother and grandmother would cringe at the thought, and only used common crackers for their stuffings. Other bases include noodles, rice or any number of combinations of ingredients. Use your imagination and substitute ingredients to suit your own tastes.

While most folks think about stuffing as being for the birds, a well-seasoned stuffing can add flavor and substance to a variety of other foods. It certainly adds to the presentation of any dish, but can also be a central part of the entrée. In addition to the traditional turkeys and chickens, try stuffing with any number of other foods, including fish, pork, artichoke hearts, tomatoes, bell peppers, zucchini, eggplant, rock cornish hens, mushroom caps, eggs, or just have stuffing!

Fresh oysters not available? Try canned oysters, or for added flavor, add smoked oysters.

Bon appetit!

HERB AND OYSTER BREAD STUFFING FOR POULTRY

1 pint oysters and liquor
1 cup unsalted butter
1 cup chopped onion
1 cup chopped celery
8 cups cubed day-old bread
2 well-beaten eggs
½ teaspoon ground sage
½ teaspoon dried thyme
½ teaspoon dried marjoram
½ teaspoon dried rosemary
½ cup chopped fresh parsley
salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Drain and coarsely chop the oysters, reserving ½ cup of the liquor. Melt the butter in a skillet; pour off and reserve ½ cup. Sauté the onion and celery in the skillet until tender. Stir in the oyster liquor and simmer for about 5 minutes. Toss the bread cubes and the vegetable mixture together in a large bowl, and allow the mixture to cool slightly. Add the eggs and herbs, and mix until well blended. Gradually add the reserved butter to moisten the stuffing. Add the oysters and salt and pepper to taste. Allow the stuffing to cool before using.

—Joan Reardon