

Cape Cod

Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket Magazine™

The 99 BEST THINGS TO EAT



Let's Eat!

Clambakes • Dinner Parties • Pizza

Clamming



It Up



Like the Native Americans of old, Cole prepared a pit. Unlike the Native Americans, however, he had the help of a contractor with an excavator. He surrounded the pit with a white picket fence to protect stray kids from getting too close. After digging the pit, Cole personally gathered plenty of boulders to lay in the pit. Two tons of boulders, in fact. I raise my eyes in surprise at the claim. "Trust me, I know," he laughs, "I moved them by hand."

On days when the grill features the clambake, one of the kitchen's chefs begins the process early in the afternoon, layering wood and coals in the pit sometime after lunch. It's taken a bit of trial and error to determine the timing for lighting the fire. Like a meteorologist, Cole keeps a careful watch on the weather. A windy day requires less time because the wind speed forces the fire to burn more quickly. He'll start the fire at 1:00 on a calm day, at 1:30 on a windy day.

After several hours, it's time to rake the coals. When doing so, there are times when Cole feels himself literally cooking up. Executive Sous Chef Michael Peponis concurs,





“Remember the time my face burned? It was totally red. For two days, I looked like I had an intense sunburn.” Cole has his own battle scars: “I melted my shoe once.”

When the time is right for cooking, six chefs magically converge at the pit. “Ready, chef?” one asks. Cole nods and responds, “It’s showtime.” A mother calls to her children, “Look they’re doing the clam-bake.” Just returning from the beach, the children put down their pails and buckets to watch.

Just before laying on the food, Cole and his staff generously distribute seaweed over the scorching



rocks. The wet seaweed sizzles and hisses, creating a dramatic cloud of steam. Except for the steaming heat, this crew looks like big children playing at the beach.

The food is carefully placed upon the seaweed, layered yet again with more seaweed and then covered with a canvas tarp that has been soaked overnight in water. An outdoor plastic tarp secured down by more boulders encloses everything. Burn holes are proof that the tarp has done this kind of work before.



Cole grabs a winter shovel, which looks strangely incongruous on a brilliantly sunny August day in Chatham. (Snow? What's that?) With the shovel, Cole piles sand on top of the edges of the tarp, securing the heat inside to protect against the cool ocean breezes outside.

Then we wait.

Beneath the tarp, the rockweed has bubbles filled with salty water. The saltwater heats up and pops the bubbles, creating steam by natural time release. According to Cole, the salty taste is unlike anything you'll get when lobsters,

steamers and corn are simply boiled together in a big pot (for those of us without backyard pits lined with two tons of rocks).

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Executive Sous Chef Michael Peponis (left) and Executive Chef Anthony Cole of Chatham Bars Inn.



The DIY Clambake

- Dig a trench at the beach or in your backyard approximately 1 foot deep by 4 feet in diameter.
- * Take a break from the physical labor and reconsider making reservations at Chatham Bars Inn.
- Layer the pit with rocks that are almost as big as a basketball, keeping the layer even.
- Place split hardwood, such as local oak or maple, on top of the rocks.
- Add 2 to 3 inches of charcoal on top of the hardwood.
- Light the fire and burn for 3½ to 4 hours.
- Rake the coals, letting the ash and hot coals fall between the cracks. Be sure to wear shoes that won't be missed if they melt under the intense heat.
- Fill a bucket with seaweed and saltwater and add a ½-inch layer of seaweed to your pit.
- Wrap seafood and corn in a cheese-cloth or burlap bag and lay evenly atop the seaweed.
- Position lobsters (1¼ to 1½ pounds) in an upside down position close to the center to ensure that (a) they cook better and (b) they cannot escape!
- Top with more seaweed.
- Cover with a canvas tarp that has been soaked in water overnight.
- Seal the edges with sand or dirt to avoid steam leaking through.
- * Sit in an Adirondack chair for an hour, wondering why you didn't just make reservations.
- Uncover carefully and serve impressive feast to admiring guests.

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WIRELESS HOTSPOT



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Cole likes the clambake because there is a calm purpose to it. "It's easy," he says, "you put the food on the pit for an hour and then, you just wait." As the hour marches on, Cole begins to check his Blackberry more frequently for the time. At about 5:26, two other chefs arrive by the pit. Cole checks the time again, four more minutes, he tells them. Is it really that exact? Apparently so, because precisely four minutes later, the chefs begin

removing the bounty from the coals.

Cole insists that the traditional method can successfully be replicated at home (see page 51). He has coached friends who have enjoyed their own briny feasts and he assures me I can do this as well. I'm not so sure. For now, I'm happy to dig in at the Chatham Bars Inn, which has begun to take on a festive, cruise-like atmosphere.

A band is playing old favorites as families pour in, many of whom represent three generations. Larry the





Lobster appears to greet a swarm of young fans. The handcrafted buffet tables, constructed to resemble beach boardwalks, are laden with food: clam chowder, raw oysters and clams, shrimp cocktail, salads and corn-bread. At the Chatham Bars Inn, you're not in some sterile banquet hall, you're at the beach and the dining room reflects that. A chef mans a huge grill where he'll cook New York Strip Steaks to order, as well as barbecued chicken and linguica.

Cole, of course, is right about the flavor from the food cooked on the pit. Incredibly, the corn tastes like the sea. The potatoes have a smoky briny taste. And, the lobster lives up to the rest of the meal. I go back to the buffets for seconds on everything. Sure, maybe you can create a delicious clambake at home but after going to the Chatham Bars Inn, who wants to? ●

**Chatham Bars Inn
Clambake**

Clambakes are held at the Beach House Grill twice weekly during summer months. For more information, visit the Inn at 297 Shore Road, Chatham, call 508.945.6871, or visit the website at chathambarsinn.com.

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