

**Subject:** Moules Paysanne  
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### **Mussels Peasant Style (Moules Paysanne)**

This is a very simple and quickly made dish to serve as a first course for two or three. It was in the city of Pau, the capital of the Béarn, that I first tasted this dish. What impressed me most, I think, is how well mussels and ham go together despite the fact that both are rather salty. The soft fresh white bread crumbs seemed to swallow up the excess salt and kept the dish light.

One of my favorite menus for spring begins with these mussels. Follow with a Confit of Duck with Green Peas and Ham and a dish of Preserved Spiced Pears in Red Wine with Armagnac.

Makes 2 to 3 servings

Ingredients:

- 2 pounds fresh mussels, cleaned
- 2 to 3 tablespoons soft fresh white bread crumbs
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 ounce jambon de Bayonne, prosciutto, or Serrano ham, cut into thin matchsticks
- 1 1/2 teaspoons minced shallots
- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1/2 teaspoon finely minced garlic (chopped by hand)
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- freshly ground pepper

Preparation:

Preheat the oven to 300 degrees F.

Roll bread crumbs in a towel to dry them well. Unroll and fluff them so that they are loose. Set aside.

In a non-aluminum skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the butter. Gently cook the ham and shallots 4 to 5 minutes without browning.

Meanwhile, steam mussels. Strain the liquor through several layers of damp cheesecloth and add to the skillet. Add the wine and cook until reduced by one quarter.

Remove the upper shell of each mussel and discard. Place the mussels in their half shells on a shallow heatproof platter. Cover loosely with foil and set in oven to keep warm.

Add garlic, parsley, a few grinds of pepper and the bread crumbs to the reduced cooking liquid. Reduce heat to medium.

Cut the remaining butter into small chunks. Add to the skillet, swirl until butter binds with bread crumbs to make a sauce. Pour over the mussels and serve at once. Pass rounds of lightly toasted French bread rubbed with garlic.

Source: The Cooking of Southwest France