**Soft Shell Clam**  
*Mya arenaria*

**WILD CAUGHT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harvest Region</th>
<th>Coastal Maine to Cape Cod</th>
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<td>Seasonality</td>
<td>Live and Whole: Summer Months</td>
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<td>Shucked: Year Round</td>
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**Flavor Profile:** Sweet, Slight Salt  
**Texture Profile:** Tender, delicate

**Substitute:**  
- Razor Clam  
- Littleneck Clam  
- Geoduck Clam

Soft Shell Clams have many names – but here in Maine they are best known as the “Steamer” clam. Regardless of what they are called, these clams thrive in our waters and are a staple to our regional cuisine - a favorite of locals and visitors alike. Many chefs are “rediscovering” these clams and exploring less traditional preparations than simply steaming or frying them; many view their versatility as a cross between a razor clam and Pacific Geoduck.

More brittle than soft, their chalky white oval shells are thin and can be easily chipped or broken if not handled properly. Unlike their hard shell cousins like the Littleneck that can close completely, the soft shell clam’s “neck” (actually a siphon) remains outside of the shell leaving the clam agape. The siphon is covered in a darkish skin that most prefer to remove prior to eating. Soft shell clams range in size but usually are not larger than three inches long. They have a surprisingly long life span – though they begin to reproduce at one year, they can live up to 10-12 years.

Soft shell clams are not cultivated but are found wild in inshore tidal mudflats all along the coastline. Harvesting is done by hand during the low tides by raking or hoeing along the beds using clamming “forks”. While this method of harvest has a much lower impact on the seafloor than mechanical dredging, it is laborious work that is subject to limitations in manpower, inclement weather, tides and bed closures – often making the soft shell clam a limited commodity. Shucking commercially is done by hand as well in processing plants along the shore.

These are the classic “Steamers” in New England – steamed open and served dipped in clam juice and melted butter. They are equally popular as the famous fried clam (often sold as “fried belly clams”) either breaded or battered, in chowders, stuffed (in Southern New England) – and alongside lobster and corn in traditional clambakes.

Due to the fact that soft shell clams are “open”, they require more care than the watertight hard shells. Sand, mud and grit can accumulate in them during harvest and the clams should be “purged” in salt water for a minimum of one hour (overnight is recommended) in refrigeration. We stored with ice extra care should be given to not directly expose them to melting ice as the water will kill them. To check to make sure they are alive and fresh, tap on the shell or siphon, which should be firm and not limp – shell should close somewhat and siphon should withdraw. Usually sold by the Bushel or Half Bushel, or by the pound. Seasonal. Shucked Soft Shell Clams (Meats) are sold Fresh or Frozen by the Half Gallon.

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