

## The Enticing Oyster, in Months With 'R' or Not



**CAN TAKE THE HEAT** Oysters bob in a soup amid puréed peas, Pernod and watercress.

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SURELY if I put my mind to it I could learn how to shuck oysters without serious damage to myself. But I haven't done so, even though I love them when they are icy cold, filled with the briny flavor of the sea and ready to be slurped out of the shell.

So when I ordered some Pacific oysters for dinner this past New Year's Eve — they arrived just one day out of the ocean — I took the coward's way out: I asked for a jar filled with oysters already shucked. And then I set about finding a way to make cooked oysters as memorable as raw.

One recipe — from Sophie Grigson, an English cookbook author — caught my attention immediately. Her combination of apples, crème fraîche, lemon and oysters was so unexpected that I tried the recipe before serving it at the party.

The sweet, firm apples turned out to be the perfect foil for the soft, minerally oyster. The crème fraîche plays the same role as cream or milk in a simple stew. One oyster lightly

cooked on top of a baked apple ring and topped with the lemon-flavored crème fraîche is all you need for a memorable appetizer.

And a comment from a colleague about peas and oysters turned my mind to a pea and arugula soup I had created out of a recipe for puréed peas with watercress. I brought back the watercress and added some Pernod, the oyster's favorite alcoholic beverage, and now have a gorgeous spring green variation on the soup.

However you cook them, don't shy away from shucked oysters. According to the oysters-"R"-in-season theory, this is the last good month for oysters until September. But today that is less true, thanks to improvements in monitoring at the farms.

Even so, oysters do have a fuller, richer flavor in the winter, so warmer weather is a good time to serve them cooked.