

ULTIMATE SIX

"French-kissing a mermaid," SEATTLE-AREA NOVELIST TOM ROBBINS, DESCRIBING EATING A RAW OYSTER

Exquisite oysters



1. BEST IN THE WEST

If you want variety and reputation in oysters, you can't beat Elliott's Oyster House on Pier 56 in Seattle.

Elliott's selection, 24 to 36 kinds a day during the season and 15 in the summer, is the indisputable Northwest oyster palace. An oyster-savvy staff and consistent oyster freshness earned the restaurant national recognition from *Gourmet* and *Fortune* magazines and *USA Today* as one of the country's top places to savor oysters.

1201 Alaskan Way, Pier 56, Seattle; 206-623-4340

2. PORTLAND SHELLFISH NEWCOMER

Alberta Street Oyster Bar & Grill serves dinner only, though a well-attended happy hour beginning at 4:30 p.m. is hooking new oyster fans.

The restaurant shucks a handful of fresh oyster varieties every night except Tuesday.

A half-dozen oysters on the half shell costs \$15 to \$17. Chef Eric Bechard also serves panko-breaded fried oysters with a quail-egg-topped frisée salad and warm bacon vinaigrette, and makes oyster stew on Sundays.

2926 N.E. Alberta St., Portland; 503-284-9600

3. JAKE'S, OF COURSE

McCormick & Schmick restaurants, which include the 114-year-old Jake's Famous Crawfish, are shellfish institutions.

Every day, the menu's fresh sheet features four to 10 oyster varieties on the half shell. An order of six costs \$10 to \$14. If you prefer cooked oysters, try them pan-fried or in Jake's traditional oyster stew.

Jake's: 401 S.W. 12th Ave., Portland; 503-226-1419

4. OYSTER BARGAIN

Oysters on the half shell are a deal at Southpark Seafood Grill & Wine Bar.

Pay \$10.50 from a rotating Northwest selection: delicate Pearl Points, sweet Hood Canals known for their cucumber finish, or firm, sweet Fanny Bays. A half-dozen coveted "Kumos" costs \$15.

Count on bartender/wine buyer Will Prouty to match you up with an oyster-loving beverage.

901 S.W. Salmon St., Portland; 503-326-1300

5. FRESH GIFT

Here's a fresh idea for a holiday gift. Taylor Shellfish Farms sells two dozen just-harvested live oysters in the shell for \$29 plus shipping.

The package includes four each of the crunchy European Flats, fleshy Virginicas and sweet-salty Pacifics, and six each of the Kumamotos and the 50-cent-piece-size native Olympias. The shellfish arrive with an oyster knife, shucking instructions and Jon Rowley's "Art of Eating an Oyster."

Call 360-492-3300 or see www.taylorshellfishfarms.com.

6. OYSTER STEW

Xinh Dweley, chef at Xinh's Clam & Oyster House, Shelton, Wash., offers her easy recipe:

- 2 pints oysters
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 8-ounce can evaporated milk
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon dried basil
- ½ cup butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 4 cups milk
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- ½ cup bacon bits

Blanch oysters two to three minutes. Drain. Cut into bite-size pieces. Melt butter, sauté garlic and onion. Add oysters, milk, salt, pepper, basil and bacon bits. Stir until warm. Do not boil.

STORY BY ANGELA ALLEN // PHOTOS BY TIM LABARGE, JON ROWLEY, COURTESY ELLIOT'S OYSTER HOUSE