How to Pick & Cook Clams with Pancetta

The most crucial part of learning how to pick & cook clams with pancetta happens at the fish store. Get small littleneck clams, no more than 2 inches across. That ensures they'll be tender and sweet—not rubbery and tough. The rest of the dish is a collection of simple pantry staples. Don't be afraid to improvise: If you don't have leeks, use scallions or a shallot, or just go with the garlic. You'll want to have crusty bread on hand to sop up the liquid gold that's a beautiful byproduct in the pot when the clams are done cooking.

Ingredients

4 ounces pancetta, cut in ¼-inch dice
1 stalk celery, thinly sliced (about 1 cup)
1 small leek, thinly sliced, white and light green parts only (about 1 cup)
2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced lengthwise
3/4 cup white wine
3 dozen small littleneck clams (about 2 inches), scrubbed clean
Celery leaves, for garnish
Crusty bread, for serving

Directions

Heat a Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the pancetta and cook, stirring, until lightly browned and crisp, about 5 minutes. Scoop the celery and leeks into the pan. Cook, stirring, until they soften and their color brightens, 2 to 3 minutes. Toss in the garlic and stir for about 30 seconds. Pour in the wine and let it come to a bubble. Carefully dump in the clams and stir to coat with the seasoned liquid. Adjust the heat so it maintains a simmer, cover the pan, and let the clams steam. Gently shake the pan every couple of minutes —gently!— like you would if you were making popcorn. After about 7 minutes, check to see if any of the clams have opened. Remove opened clams to a serving bowl and keep steaming the rest until they all open, about 5 minutes more. Transfer all open clams to the serving bowl and turn off the heat. Discard any unopened clams. Scatter celery leaves over the clams. Ladle some of the broth over the clams in the serving bowl for dipping, but avoid any grit that the clams might have

given up on the bottom of the pan. Have the crusty bread available for sopping up the broth. Dive in.

Cook's Notes
Make sure you get small clams, no larger than 2 inches, or they'll take too long to cook and will be rubbery and gross.

total time: 30 minutes
active prep: 30 minutes
serves: 4 servings
difficulty: easy