Summer Seafood Salad

2 cups water
1 carrot, peeled and diced
1/2 celery rib, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
1 garlic clove, crushed
1/2 small lemon, sliced
1/2 lb. medium shrimp, peeled, deveined
1/2 lb. sea scallops, halved
1 lb. mussels, scrubbed
1 container (6 oz.) cooked lobster meat
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
1 bag Taste of Inspirations Spring Mix
1/2 cup Taste of Inspirations Raspberry Nectar Vinaigrette

**STEP 1** Combine first 5 ingredients in medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium; add shrimp, cover and cook 3 minutes. With slotted spoon, transfer shrimp to large bowl. Return liquid to boil; add scallops, cook 2 minutes, transfer with slotted spoon to bowl. Add mussels to liquid and cook covered over high heat 2 minutes or until mussels open. Transfer to a plate to cool slightly. Remove mussels from shell, add to bowl with other fish. Toss with dressing, add lobster meat and parsley. Cover and refrigerate 1 hour.

**STEP 2** Arrange Spring Mix evenly on 6 serving plates. Spoon seafood mixture over greens.
Lobster stew is the most curious of culinary icons. Everyone seems to agree it is a treasured dish of almost mythic status, beloved by generations of Mainers.

“It’s a classic,” says Chef Harding Lee Smith, who periodically offers it as a special at his Grill Room and Front Room restaurants in Portland.

“It’s the real Maine experience,” says Cal Hancock, head of Hancock Gourmet Lobster in Cundy’s Harbor, whose lobster stew won a gold medal in 2007 from the National Association of Specialty Foods. “If you live in Maine, it’s real comfort food. It’s the best thing since sliced bread.”

Trouble is, no one can agree on exactly what it is.

Some take a minimalist view. They sauté chunks of cooked lobster in butter, add it to warmed cream with salt and pepper, and serve it immediately with a dollop of butter floating on top. “I don’t think anybody can improve on that,” says George Olson, who offered a demonstration of his technique at Uncle Kippy’s, his restaurant in Lubec.

Others insist, equally fervently, that it isn’t lobster stew without paprika (which intensifies the reddish color), a good lobster stock to enhance the flavor, and perhaps some sherry, an elegant touch.

Lydia Shire, executive chef of Blue Sky on York Beach, makes a lobster stew she claims was a favorite of President John F. Kennedy. She boils live lobsters for five minutes, removes the meat, and saves the shells. Then she cooks the shells in a Dutch oven with sherry; adds milk, cream, paprika, salt, and pepper; and refrigerates the mixture overnight to let the flavors develop. The following day, she cooks the shelled meat with butter and more sherry, adds the cream mixture, heats until warm, and serves her “JFK Lobster Stew” garnished with parsley.

By using the shells, Shire comes close to making lobster bisque, which is sometimes confused with lobster stew because both are cream-based. But bisque involves cooking the shells and then grinding them into a paste which is added to the soup, or making a roux. Bisque also can be thickened with rice, which is strained or pureed in the final stages of preparation. The end product is thicker and redder than lobster stew.

Lobster stew, of course, isn’t really a stew, which typically involves slow-cooking meat or seafood with vegetables and thickening the liquid with flour to make a gravy.

Establishing the key ingredients in lobster stew can be as controversial as debating politics or religion, and partisans feel no less passionately about their views. Chefs and home cooks alike disagree about whether lobster stew should contain onions, or garlic, or a little dry mustard, or potatoes…and the list goes on. Harding Smith makes a version with lobster tomalley and roe “to give it depth.” Cal Hancock’s award-winning stew was inspired by her grandmother—a traditional version enhanced with lobster stock, spices, and a little tomato paste. “My grandmother always said, ‘Don’t do anything to hide the taste of the lobster,’” Hancock recalls. “It’s a delicate balance.”

And a tricky one. Trying to find the perfect lobster stew can seem like the search for the Holy Grail. Is the dish too creamy or too milky? Too thick or too thin? Too simple to make or too complex? Does it have the right ratio of lobster to liquid? (The consensus seems to be 40 or 50 percent, but this is a subject of debate, too.) And should the stew be served right away or refrigerated for a while so the lobster fla-
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by budget-conscious fishermen’s wives, who laboriously picked the meat from lobster bodies and “stewed” it in creamy milk—which was readily available—with just a few spices for a quick, easy, and economical meal. “It was a great way to use leftover lobster,” says Chef Larry Matthews of Portland’s Back Bay Grill, who recalls his grandmother made lobster stew this way. Who would have guessed the dish was headed for stardom?

Lubec is a little fishing village with around six very different restaurants. One of the few things they have in common is lobster stew on the menu.

“You have to,” says George Olson, who’s been the cook (not chef, he insists) at Uncle Kippy’s for 26 years. “If you don’t have it, people will go somewhere else.”

“I’ve tried everything, all kinds of variations,” Olson continues. “But my mother made it, and I do it the same way. The only secret is to use lobster that is fresh, really fresh. That’s what Maine is all about.”

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