

# ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

ENTERTAINING

## How to Host a Classic Summer Clambake

Ryan Murphy, the executive chef behind Rhode Island's Weekapaug Inn, shares his tips for throwing the perfect seaside shindig



Photo: Daniel Grill/Getty



It wouldn't be summer without a classic New England clambake on the books. But why while away the season waiting for an invitation? We asked Ryan Murphy, executive chef of Rhode Island's iconic [Weekapaug Inn](#), to share his tips on [how to throw the perfect party](#), whether you're hosting a crowd-pleasing beachfront shindig or an intimate dinner on your roof terrace—no ocean in sight. (Or a [July 4th](#) bash.) “Cooking for friends, family, and potential new friends is the best way to show you love them,” Murphy says. “Hosting a clambake is the best way to do that and enjoy the delicious bounties of the sea.” The good news is that it's just as easy to host a clambake as a traditional barbecue. Another plus: If you've got a deep pot and a gaggle of friends, you're already halfway there. Just load up on fresh seafood, cue the [surf](#) decor, and read on for Murphy's tried-and-true ideas.

**Make a plan.** “I like to get my shellfish and fish the day of,” says Murphy. “But for larger groups, having a few days of prep is recommended.” Murphy suggests purchasing four clams, four mussels, and 1¼ pounds of lobster per person, all served family-style. Accompaniments may include potatoes, corn, and other seasonal vegetables. “It all depends on who you’re serving,” he says. “At the Weekapaug Inn, I can also leverage what our food forager brings in from the farmers’ market that day to add a twist to the menu.”

**Set the scene.** For a presentation worthy of the fare, Murphy uses “seaweed, shells, rocks, even sand” on the tables. Opt for classic checkerboard tablecloths in red and blue and sprinkle a few lanterns throughout for ambience. If you’re by the sea, “Place your tables as close to the water as possible—if not in the water itself—so guests are encouraged to take their shoes off and get comfortable,” he says. “Anything you can do to boost the experience and create a beautiful setting all plays into traditional clambakes.”

**Be ready for anything.** Clambakes have a way of bringing people out of the woodwork. “One year we had only 25 booked; the day of, 80 people showed up,” Murphy says. “So we turned the whole event into a cooking demo with wine pairing to buy us time to get our suppliers to deliver more seafood, but the guests didn’t even notice. Most said it was the best-held event they had ever been to.”