

# Billi Bi

By Sam Sifton

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**Total Time** 50 minutes

**Rating** ★★★★★ (773)



Andrew Scrivani for The New York Times

Craig Claiborne, who brought this amazing cream of mussels soup to The Times in the 1960s and refined it over the years with his longtime kitchen collaborator Pierre Franey, once called it "the most elegant and delicious soup ever created." It is also one of the easiest to make. Use wine to steam open some mussels beneath a blanket of aromatics and use the resulting stock as a base for cream. Add the mussels and perhaps a grind of pepper. "One of the sublime creations on Earth," Claiborne wrote.

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## INGREDIENTS

**Yield:** 4 servings as an entree, 8 as an appetizer

2 pounds mussels  
2 shallots, peeled and coarsely chopped  
2 small white onions, peeled and quartered  
2 sprigs parsley, plus chopped parsley for garnish  
Kosher salt  
Pepper, to taste  
Pinch cayenne pepper  
1 cup dry white wine, like pinot grigio or sauvignon blanc  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed  
1 bay leaf  
2 sprigs fresh thyme  
2 cups heavy cream  
1 egg yolk, lightly beaten

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## PREPARATION

### Step 1

Scrub mussels well to remove dirt and, if necessary, remove beards.

### Step 2

Place mussels in large saucepan or Dutch oven and add shallots, onions, parsley, salt, pepper, cayenne, wine, butter, bay leaf and thyme. Cover and bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat and simmer 8 to 10 minutes, or until mussels have opened. Discard any that have not opened.

### Step 3

Strain liquid through a colander lined with cheesecloth and reserve; this is the base for the soup.

### Step 4

When cool enough to handle, remove mussels from shells and reserve. Discard shells and aromatics.

### Step 5

Bring reserved liquid to a low boil in a small saucepan. Add cream and return mixture almost to a boil, then remove from heat. Let cool slightly then add egg yolk and stir to combine. Return saucepan to heat and let thicken slightly. (Do not boil.)

### Step 6

Taste and adjust seasoning. To serve, arrange mussels in center of large soup dishes and spoon liquid over them. Sprinkle with chopped parsley.

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## Private Notes

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