

Nice simple recipe with links to cocktail sauce alternatives.

— AMERICA'S —
TEST KITCHEN

Shrimp Cocktail

Why This Recipe Works

Shrimp cocktail should feel like luxury: plump, snappy, well-chilled meat with clean, oceanic sweetness. Nailing that profile is all about poaching the shrimp just right. Brining the shrimp seasoned them deeply, evenly, and quickly. Poaching them in the brine along with additional lightly seasoned water enhanced their flavor even more. Heating a measured amount of shrimp and water together allowed the shrimp to cook gradually so that there was little risk of overshooting the mark of 140 degrees. Calibrating the recipe so that the shrimp reached 140 degrees when the water reached 160 allowed us to monitor the temperature of the water instead of the temperature of the shrimp. For some fresh takes on the dipping sauce, we riffed on classic [cocktail sauce](#) and also mixed up a [Creole Rémoulade](#) and [Creamy Chermoula](#).



Gather Your Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons table salt, divided
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 pounds shell-on jumbo shrimp (16 to 20 per pound), peeled and deveined, tails left on

Before You Begin

- * The cook time is based on jumbo shrimp, which is our choice for this recipe. If using extra-large shrimp (21-25 per pound), heat the water to 155 degrees. If using extra-jumbo shrimp (13-15 per pound), heat the water to 163 degrees. We like to serve this shrimp with any or all of the following sauces: [Creamy Chermoula Sauce](#), [Chipotle-Lime Cocktail Sauce](#), [Creole Rémoulade](#) and [Cocktail Sauce](#). The shrimp and sauces can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours.

○ 8 cups ice

Instructions

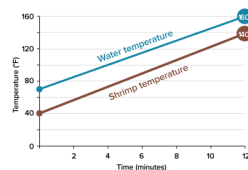
1. Dissolve 2 tablespoons salt and sugar in 1 quart cold water in large container. Submerge shrimp in brine, cover, and brine for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, combine ice and 1 quart water in large bowl and set aside.
2. Whisk 1 quart cold water and remaining 1 tablespoon salt in large Dutch oven until salt is dissolved. Add shrimp and their brining liquid and set over medium heat. Cook, stirring frequently, until water registers 160 degrees and shrimp are firm and have turned pink, about 12 minutes.
3. Using spider skimmer or slotted spoon, immediately transfer shrimp to prepared ice bath and let shrimp cool completely, about 10 minutes. Drain shrimp and transfer to bowl. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Poached Shrimp's Sweet Spot for Doneness—and How to Achieve It

The texture of poached shrimp is just right, we confirmed after a slew of tests, when they're cooked to 140 degrees. At this temperature (the same target doneness we like for lobster), the flesh is nicely plump and tender as well as snappy—perfect for swiping through cocktail sauce.

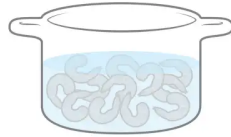
Since it's fussy to take the temperature of shrimp as they cook, we temp the water instead. Provided you use the prescribed size and amount of shrimp and water, the shrimp will reach 140 degrees when the water hits 160 degrees.

Track the Water to Track the Shrimp: We've calibrated the method so that when the water temperature hits 160 degrees, the shrimp hit 140 degrees.



A New Way to Poach Shrimp: Cold-Start Poaching

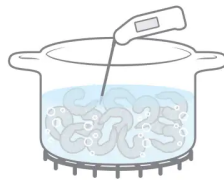
Dropping shrimp into hot water is the fastest way to poach them, but that cooks the flesh so quickly that it's virtually impossible to prevent the exterior—if not the entire shrimp—from instantly overcooking. We prefer a cold-start poach: Heat a measured amount of shrimp and water together and then stop cooking when the water hits its target. That way, the shrimp cook gently and won't exceed their own target doneness.



BRINE SHRIMP; ADD MORE SEASONED WATER TO POT

Brining shrimp seasons them more quickly and evenly than salting does and plumps up their flesh with water.

Poaching in a combination of the concentrated salt-sugar brine and more lightly salted water enhances the seasoning effects of the brine rather than diluting it as plain water would.



COOK UNTIL WATER HITS 160 DEGREES

Heating the shrimp and water together cooks them gently, minimizing the risk of overcooking. The shrimp reliably hit the 140-degree mark when the water reaches its target.



SHOCK IN ICE BATH; DRAIN

Plunging the cooked shrimp into an ice bath quickly chills them to prevent carryover cooking.