
Crab Cakes

The ideal crab cake is made of big chunks of lump crabmeat held together with minimal bread crumbs and egg. While good-quality lump crabmeat, especially jumbo grade (see page 132 for more about crabmeat grades), has very little shell and cartilage, you should pick through it to be sure. To spot the cartilage, spread the meat on a sheet pan and slide it under the broiler for just a few seconds. The cartilage will turn red.

MAKES 8 CAKES (4 MAIN-COURSE SERVINGS OR 8 FIRST-COURSE SERVINGS)

1 pound lump crabmeat
6 tablespoons fresh bread crumbs
2 eggs
2 teaspoons salt
Pinch of pepper
3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley
½ cup flour
3 tablespoons butter
Tartar Sauce (see page 361)

Pick through the crabmeat and discard any bits of shell or cartilage. Work the bread crumbs through a fine-mesh strainer to make them very fine.

In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, salt, pepper, and parsley until blended. Add the crabmeat and bread crumbs. Gently work the mixture until you can form it into patties.

Form the mixture into 8 patties each about ½ inch thick. Spread the flour on a plate, dust the patties with the flour, and pat off the excess.

In a sauté pan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the patties and cook for about 3 minutes on each side, or until firm to the touch and golden brown. Serve with the sauce.

Tartar Sauce

Some recipes for tartar sauce contain anchovies, but the choice is yours. Make Basic Mayonnaise as directed, using white wine vinegar instead of lemon juice and increasing the mustard to 2 tablespoons. Combine 2 shallots, minced; 3 tablespoons minced cornichons; 4 anchovy fillets, chopped and crushed to a paste (optional); and 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives, and stir into the mayonnaise. Tartar sauce should be tangy, so you may want to add a teaspoon or two more vinegar.

Serving Mayonnaise Hot

Most people think of mayonnaise as a cold sauce, but for generations aioli has been used to flavor fish soup in the south of France (see the recipe for Bourride on page 56). To serve mayonnaise as a heated sauce, whisk an appropriate hot liquid, such as fish broth, shellfish steaming liquid, chicken or meat broth, soup, or a braising liquid, into a relatively small amount of flavored mayonnaise and return the mixture to the heat for just a few seconds to warm it. Do not warm it too long or the yolks will curdle and the oil will separate.