Moules Mariniere
(Mussels steamed in wine broth, “in the style of the mariner’s wife”)

4 dozen fresh, live mussels in the shell, cleaned (see below)
1/2 stick butter
4 cloves garlic, minced
1 onion, finely chopped
3/4 cup dry white wine
2 bay leaves
Freshly-ground black pepper
Fresh parsley

Prep the mussels. Buy live mussels on ice, choosing only those that are closed. Keep cool in a dark place. Rinse the closed mussels, scrubbing with a food brush; do not use soap. Remove the beards with your fingers.

Prep the broth. In a kettle, melt the butter over moderate heat and sauté the onion until tender. Add the garlic and cook for another minute or so. Toss in the bay leaves, the mussels, the wine and a liberal grinding of pepper. Stir, cover and simmer over moderate-low heat.

When most of the mussels have opened, transfer them to large soup plates. Discard mussels that don’t open. Pour some of the broth over the mussels, garnish with fresh parsley, and serve with bread for dipping.

This recipe serves four people as a first course, eight as an appetizer and two as a meal in itself.

—David Sisk