DRUNKEN MUSSELS WITH CIDER AND BACON *(serves 2)*

1 kg (2 lbs) mussels*
100 g bacon or pancetta, diced
Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed
1 large or 2 medium leeks
2 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves picked and roughly chopped
1 bunch Italian flat-leaf parsley, coarsely chopped
200 ml dry cider
2 to 3 tbsp whipping cream
salt and pepper to taste
lemon juice to taste

serve with soda bread for dunking, and a green salad

- Place the mussels in a large bowl and cover with water. Use your hands to give them a good clean, and a paring knife to "de-beard" them. Discard any that don't close tightly when tapped, and any that are broken.
- In a wide pot with a tight-fitting lid, add the bacon or pancetta then place on a medium-low heat, rendering off the fat before increasing the heat and cooking the bacon until it is golden brown.
- Add the sliced leek, and sweat over a medium heat until softened, seasoning with salt and adding olive oil if the pan is too dry.
- Add the cider, bringing up to a simmer then add the mussels and half of the parsley.
- Cover and place over a high heat to steam, shaking the pan or stirring occasionally.
- Meanwhile place a colander in a large bowl.
- When all of the mussel shells are open (about 3-5 minutes), pour them with their juices into the colander, holding back the last few spoonfuls of broth, which will contain sand and grit.
- Place the mussels in a large serving bowl, or in individual bowls.
- Return the broth to the pan and bring to the boil. Add the cream, and reduce.

- Season to taste with salt and lemon juice, stir in the remaining parsley, then pour over the mussels.
- Serve with soda bread for dunking.

* To store live mussels after purchase, place them in a bowl and cover them with a dampened tea towel. Keep them in the bottom of your fridge. Clean them not long before you plan to cook them.

EQUIPMENT

Cutting boards and knives
Measuring cups and spoons
Paring knife for cleaning mussels
Bowls
Wide pot with a tight-fitting lid, for cooking the mussels
A colander, sitting in a bowl
A whisk