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[Learn to Speak Lobster](#)

Across the country, school's out for the summer. This fall, however, it will be back in session for millions of students nationwide, who'll descend upon their classrooms with backpacks crammed full of books, pencils, paper and lunch money. Among them will be 20 hungry gourmands. Attending Lobster College in Orono, Maine, they'll be asked to bring just one school supply to class: their appetites.

A popular program offered by the Lobster Institute at the University of Maine, Lobster College is the best kind of school there is. No essays. No homework. No tests. Just lots and lots of delicious, fresh Maine lobster.



Taking place Sept. 17-20, 2009, at Kenniston Hill Inn B&B, Lobster College will be a crash course in all things lobster. Students will bait and haul lobster traps, visit a working lobster wharf and learn all there is to learn about lobster biology, ecology, economics and cuisine. And, of course, they'll eat. A lot.

Unfortunately, Lobster College is open to only 20 students, which means you'll probably have to sit this semester out. It doesn't mean, however, that you can't learn to speak the language of lobster. In fact, because it's simple to prepare and yet special to eat, lobster is an ideal self-guided study subject for the home cook — and we've got the Cliffs Notes right here!

To quickly learn lobster, consider the answers to these five questions:



1. What Is Lobster?

The first thing you should know about lobster is what it is. Simply put, it's a crustacean. That much is true of all lobsters. Not all lobsters are identical, however. In fact, there are really two basic types of lobsters. The first, spiny lobsters, have super large antennae and no claws; they're mostly from California and the Caribbean and are usually eaten only for the tail. The second kind of lobster, clawed lobsters, are the iconic kind that typically come to mind when you think "lobster." They come in a smaller European variety and a larger American variety, and both have more meat than their spiny cousins.

2. Where Does Lobster Come From?

American clawed lobsters typically come from the east coast of the United States and Canada. The best are from Maine, as Maine lobsters — considered the filet mignon of lobster — are the biggest, meatiest variety of lobster available. More interesting than its geography, however, is lobster's history, as Native Americans used it as fertilizer for their fields. It wasn't popular among colonists until the mid-19th century. Before that, eating lobster — now a luxury item — was considered a mark of poverty.

3. How Do I Buy Lobster?

Before it can be bought, lobster has to be caught. Lobstering is therefore an important industry in the New England economy. More than a job, it's a trade, as setting, baiting and hauling lobster traps is a skill that's passed down between generations of lobstermen. To catch their prize, lobster fishers use one-way traps set in shallow coastal waters. Because lobster supplies are limited, they have to do the catching by hand — no diving and no big machines or mechanical traps — and they can't always keep everything they catch; they can't harvest female lobsters with visible eggs, for instance, especially small lobsters (juveniles) or especially large ones (considered healthy breeding stock), or more lobsters than allowed by legal local limits. When lobsters do finally make their way from traps to tanks, you can make sure you have the freshest specimen by looking for live lobsters only — which come straight from the water, usually within 24 hours. They typically won't be red like they are when they're cooked, but rather a greenish-bluish-black on the top and orange below, with bits of blue throughout.

4. How Do I Cook Lobster?

Because lobsters are cooked live, be sure to handle them carefully so that you don't get pinched — they typically come with large rubber bands around their claws and should be lifted by the back — and to cook them the same day you purchase them. You can keep them fresh and live by keeping them covered with a damp cloth in the refrigerator until you're ready to cook them. When you are, you can do it any number of ways. The easiest, fastest and most common is to boil them for about eight minutes per pound. For more tender meat you can steam lobster, and for more flavorful meat you can grill it. Or, to feed more people with less lobster, try stuffing it and baking it.

5. How Do I Eat Lobster?

The last — and most important — thing you need to know about lobster is how to eat it. Because lobster meat is encased inside the hard lobster shell, getting it out can seem like an intimidating proposition. Don't worry, though: It's easier than it looks. Start by breaking off the legs, which you can pull off with a twisting motion. Next, tear off the claws, again with a twisting motion. Pull off the small pincher and then, using a nutcracker, break off the tip of the large section of claw in order to get at the meat inside, which you can literally push out with your finger. Avoid the mouth, antennae, antennules and beak, all of which are inedible, and turn next to the tail, which you can twist to separate into two sections out of which you can again push the meat with your fingers. Don't forget to peel off the top of the tail to reveal the digestive tract, which you should remove before eating the rest of the meat inside. Is it messy? Sure. But is it worth? Ask the students at Lobster College; it's an A+ meal, for sure!

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Travels In Taste is a website devoted to gourmet food. We want to provide you, the diner, with the most comprehensive and objective information on the Web about the world's most talked-about dining experiences so that you can make your informed decisions.

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- [Farmers Market](#) (24)
- [Fun Fine Dining Fridays](#) (16)
- [Green Market Mondays](#) (14)
- [Restaurant Trends](#) (50)
- [Seasonal Specials](#) (100)
- [Spotlight](#) (259)
- [Table Talk](#) (30)
- [Thursday's Top Picks](#) (16)
- [Tuesday's Table](#) (16)
- [Uncategorized](#) (24)
- [Wine & Spirits Wednesdays](#) (17)



- [Las Vegas Restaurant Openings](#)
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- [October 2010](#) (8)
- [September 2010](#) (20)
- [August 2010](#) (22)
- [July 2010](#) (20)
- [June 2010](#) (23)
- [May 2010](#) (19)
- [April 2010](#) (20)
- [March 2010](#) (22)
- [February 2010](#) (6)
- [January 2010](#) (21)
- [December 2009](#) (20)
- [November 2009](#) (5)
- [October 2009](#) (19)

- [September 2009](#) (20)
- [August 2009](#) (16)
- [July 2009](#) (20)
- [June 2009](#) (21)
- [May 2009](#) (11)
- [April 2009](#) (7)
- [March 2009](#) (7)
- [February 2009](#) (9)



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