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courtesy of the chef

Chef Albert Dilesio creates shrimp dishes such as this one at Splendido, the continuing care retirement community where he serves as executive chef.

## FOOD PREPARATION

# Cooking shrimp

## LOCAL CHEF SHARES TRICKS OF THE TRADE

By CHEF ALBERT DILESEO  
for *The Explorer*

**T**ucsonans love their seafood and, surprisingly, there are many places to find it fresh in the desert. One of my favorite varieties is shrimp.

Most people love the naturally sweet flavor of shrimp and the ability to pair it with virtually any dish, from kebabs to gumbos, or just serve it cold with cocktail sauce for dipping. However, it can be intimidating to cook shrimp on your own, which is why I've summarized a couple of tricks of the trade.

When buying fresh shrimp from your local supermarket or grocer, you should keep in mind several indicators of quality. First, it's always good to smell shrimp before you buy it to make sure it doesn't have a "fishy" odor. If shrimp smells of ammonia, rather than having a fresh and mild scent, it's best to look elsewhere. Shrimp should always be stored on ice for freshness, so make sure to note how your supermarket has it packaged or put on display.

Frozen shrimp can be extremely tasty, but, just like with fresh shrimp, there are factors to consider before buying. For example, shrimp that was peeled and de-veined before freezing may lose flavor and texture. You can easily discover this by looking over the packaging and reviewing the list of preparation terms. You should also look for any signs of surface ice on shrimp, an indicator that it has been refrozen several times and may not taste as fresh as it could.

After you purchase shrimp for your tasty dish, cleaning is an easy process. Before cooking either fresh or frozen shrimp, place it in a colander with running cold water for about five minutes. This will defrost any frozen shrimp and also clean off anything you don't want to eat, such as ocean debris.

Once the shrimp is clean, hold a shrimp in your hand and pinch off the legs from the bottom with your other hand. Then, pull off the shell starting from the opening where the legs were. Now, you have a cleaned shrimp that is ready for de-veining. Of course, if the legs have already been removed and the shrimp is de-shelled, no need to worry.

Depending on the recipe, you can leave the tail on or off. If you're making a dish in which shrimp is meant to be eaten with fingers, it's best to leave the tails on. The shells can add a nice touch since they keep the natural flavor of the shrimp inside if you decide to boil or steam them. However, it's best to remove the tail if the recipe calls for a fork. The last thing you or your guest will want is a piece of shrimp shell in your mouth. To remove the tail properly, just pull gently, and remember that all the meat in the tail is completely edible.

### LAST STEP

De-veining is the last step before cooking and incorporating shrimp into a recipe. The shrimp's dark vein, or digestive tract located on the back, can be an unappealing sight. Removing it normally won't affect the flavor of your entrée, unless the shrimp is fairly large. To remove, use a smaller knife and make a shallow cut to expose the vein. Then, simply pull it open, either with a toothpick, knife or just your hand.

With these tips, your guests will be impressed with your culinary knowledge and proper techniques of preparing a tasty summer shrimp dish.

*Chef Albert Dilesio is the executive chef for Splendido, a continuing care retirement community in Oro Valley, where he oversees all kitchen operations and menu development for the community's four dining venues. If you have any cooking questions you'd like answered, please send them directly to the chef at [askchefal@splendidotucson.com](mailto:askchefal@splendidotucson.com).*