

Trying to come up with the most annoying meal ever

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The other night, I had a small fish for dinner. The small fish combines two annoying features: (1) Lots of tiny bones, and (2) not a lot of meat. The challenge then occurred to me: Come up with the most annoying meal ever. Specifically, the criterion for *most annoying meal* would be a meal in which the diner expends the most amount of effort to obtain the least amount of food, while still adhering to the general shape of a traditional dinner. Here's what I came up with: **Appetizer:** Dried watermelon seeds. To eat dried watermelon seeds, you insert the seed vertically between your back teeth and bite down to separate the two halves. Then you extract the (tiny amount) of seed meat. **Vegetable:** Artichoke leaves. To eat artichoke leaves, you insert the leaf flat between your two front teeth and pull it with your hand, using your teeth to scrape off the meat. **Main dish:** A small fish. To eat a small fish, lay the fish on its side and remove the meat from the half that sits on top. Then you carefully remove the spine and the bones attached to it, leaving the meat from the other half on the plate. This operation is not perfect, and you still have to be on the lookout for tiny bones that remain in the fish meat. **Alternative main dish:** A small crab. Picking the meat from the body of the crab is not too difficult (though you have to avoid the gills), but extracting it from the legs takes a bit more work. You eat it in a manner similar to the artichoke leaf, inserting it between your teeth and pulling it through, using your teeth to compress the leg and extrude the meat out the end. Even if you manage to do it somewhat efficiently, it's still a messy affair. **Dessert:** Pomegranate. To eat a pomegranate, you tear it open and pick out the jelly-coated seeds. You pop the seeds into your mouth, suck off the jelly, and spit out the pits. (Or eat the pits, as some of my friends do.) (Still looking for a beverage.) **Pre-emptive snarky comment :** If you want the dinner to be truly annoying, make the guests use Windows Vista!

Life imitates art corner: I received a piece of email from a colleague who actually did this!

I have cooked a dinner very similar to this. The theme was “off-piste” dining: tasty food a restaurant would never serve because it would infuriate too many customers. My menu:

Starter: Artichoke leaves (as you describe them)

Main course: roast wood pigeon. (Very little meat on a pigeon, they’re tough, and have lots of bones, but very tasty!)

Dessert: chocolate cake (I relented)

The major unintended side-effect was that very little wine was consumed: everyone was far too busy interacting with their food!

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