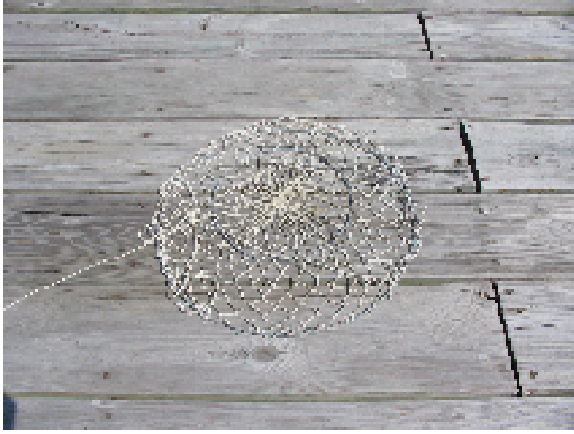


Catching Blue Crabs with Drop Nets and Cooking Them



Rigging the net, baiting



Inexpensive 2-ring drop nets are made of either cotton net, as above, or wire mesh, which catches more crabs and lasts longer. A tripod of 3 strings, the bridle, attaches to the top ring so that the net hangs level. Also needed: a steel 2-3-ounce sinker, a ball of twine, and a wooden stick or other floatable option for winding the string smoothly for storage. Crabs may be caught as early as May. The best season: June through October.



Here, steel sinkers (lead ones are bad environmentally) have been tied under these wire mesh nets to stabilize them in wave action. A long string runs from the bridle to a stick, allowing the string to be wound smoothly and stored. Should the net be dropped in the water, it can be located by the floating stick and retrieved.

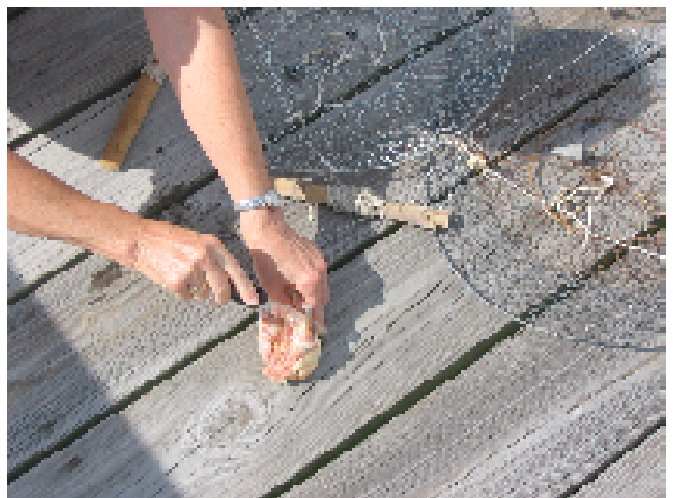
>>Fish heads or bony chicken or turkey parts make good bait. Here, a chicken back is scored so that it can be tightly tied to the inside of the bottom of the net with a bit of string. When the bait rests in warm water, it will become softer and more slippery, allowing the crabs to yank it loose. While crabs will eat rotten bait, they prefer fresh bait.



Tie the bait tightly to the bottom of the inside of the net. If the bait floats upward, the crab will follow it and thus be farther away from the net and less likely to be caught.



Secure the stick to the dock either before or after setting the net; then you can lift the net only by the string without fear that the net will be dropped in the water in the excitement of the catch.





Drop the net into the salt water. While crabs will feed at any tide, they prefer a rising tide and areas near marsh grass. Try to set the net in 2-5 feet of water. Deeper is not better. While you wait 5 minutes for the crabs to find the bait, set other nets.



Lift the net quickly but smoothly; jerking may bounce the crab out of the net. If there's no crab, lower the net back into the water, and wait another 5 minutes. An ordinary catch is 5-8 legal crabs in an hour in one place during a rising tide June through October. September and October are the best months.



Two crabs brought onto the dock. Careful! A claw pinch brings blood.



In South Carolina, legally taken crabs must be 5 inches across the carapace or shell—from point to point. Crabs any smaller are inefficient to prepare. This crab, like a lobster, has been pegged to prevent pinching.



In SC, you may take either males or females if they are 5 inches. In some states, you may take only males. The male has a “necktie” or “Washington Monument” for the sex organ cover; the female, an “apron” or “Jefferson Monument.”

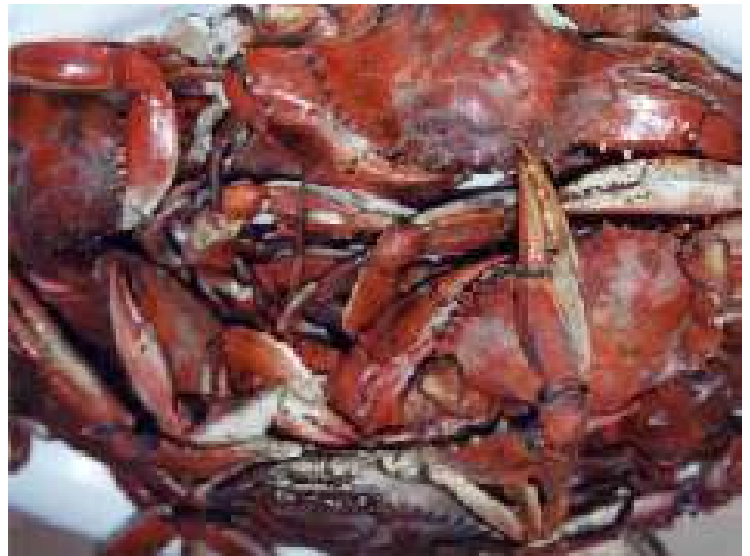
Keeping the crabs, maintaining the nets, cooking, dressing



Dump the crabs in a bucket or cooler. Submerging them in water will drown them. Packing them in ice for 15-20 minutes will slow them down enough that they are easily and safely removed from the container. Ones too small can then be separated and thrown back.



<<Pitch any used bait for the crabs. You want fresh bait for the next attempt. Wash the nets to preserve them for several seasons—and to keep them from stinking.



An easy way to serve crabs is to cover a table with newspaper, have handy a roll of paper towels for napkins, and let everyone dress and pick out crabs at his or her own pace. Serve with garlic butter or a red cocktail sauce.



Boil water in a big pot or steamer. Using tongs, dump the crabs into the boiling water. (Cooling the crabs in ice for 15-20 minutes makes this process much easier if you have little experience with handling them.) For 4-8 crabs, you may season the water with 2-3 tablespoons of crab boil, 3 tablespoons of salt, 3 tablespoons of oil, and 1/3 cup vinegar. The vinegar, oil, and salt help release the meat from the shell. Boil or steam crabs about 10 minutes.

Picking, continued; recipes



<<To prepare for casseroles, deviled crab, or crabcakes: Begin the dressing by lifting the sex organ cover (the “neck-tie” or “apron”) and prying off the carapace (back or shell). Keep and clean out the carapace if you want to fill it for deviled crab.

Clean and wash off all materials from the top of the body. Contrary to folk tales, the gills or “dead man’s fingers” are not poison. At this point, you may let people pick out their own crabs over a table covered with newspaper.

However, if you wish to prepare dishes with the crabmeat, follow the directions below.



Break bodies in half. Do not remove legs yet.



Remove legs. Standing the body half on the side where the legs attached, split the body remove meat. Also crack (not crush) and remove meat from the two large claws. About a third of the meat is in the claws.



Tear off the back leg or swimmeret. Remove this prized “lump” crabmeat.

A two-cup container will hold about a pound, enough to feed 6 people in a casserole or with one large crab cake per person. Eight to ten crabs will make a pound. Immediately after picking out crab, gather shells and take to the trash or pour back into the salt river for natural recycling. Putting this refuse in the kitchen trash can will create a terrible smell in just a few hours.



Recipes

Crabcakes for 6

2 tablespoons each finely diced onion and fresh parsley
3/4 cup mayonnaise
Juice of 1/2 lemon
1-2 teaspoons Old Bay Seasoning
1 egg
2 cups or one lb. crab
1 1/2 cups soft bread crumbs, crusts removed, or crushed saltine crackers.
Mix diced onion, parsley, mayonnaise, lemon juice, Old Bay, and egg. Add crab and 1 cup bread crumbs or crackers and mix gently to preserve maximum lumpiness of the crab. Roll in remaining bread crumbs or crackers. Make 6 large cakes or 12 small ones. Refrigerating for at least an hour helps hold the cakes together for frying.
Fry in a mixture of half oil, half butter.

Deviled Crab for 6

Do not roll in breadcrumbs. Gently place in crab carapaces or small dishes and bake at 350 for 15-20 minutes.

Crab Quesadillas for 8

8 6-inch flour tortillas
3/4 lb crab
4 tablespoons chopped green onions
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
1/2 cup sour cream
4 thin slices Jack or Monterey cheese
1 jalapeno pepper, diced, no seeds. May omit or reduce amount depending on heat of the pepper and preferences.
Mix sour cream, pepper, onions, cilantro, and crab. Divide mixture in 8 portions. Place a portion on half of a tortilla. Add strips of one half of a slice of the cheese. Fold tortilla. Spray skillet with oil. Lightly brown quesadillas on each side. May also broil. Good for lunch.

May use pizza cutter to cut into small wedges for appetizers.

Crab Newberg

For 1 lb. of crab: 6 servings
3 tablespoons of butter or margarine
6 tablespoons of flour
2 cups half-and-half
Paprika
Sherry
Make a white sauce by melting the butter in a skillet—do not brown. Add the flour, and gradually mix in the half-and-half. Turn down heat as soon as the mixture thickens. Add crab, and heat, but do not boil. Sprinkle enough paprika to give the newberg a pink tinge. Remove from heat. Just before serving add two tablespoons of sherry. Stir. Taste. Add up to 2 more tablespoons to taste. Serve on rice, noodles, or toast.

Crab Appetizer

1/2 lb crab
1/2 lb cream cheese or reduced fat cream cheese
2 tablespoons each chopped parsley, green onions
Ranch Dressing
Add enough ranch dressing to make cream cheese workable. Mix in parsley, onions, and crab. Refrigerate for 2 hours before serving.

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