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Dipping and Pickling a guide to recreational crabbing

DIPPING AND PICKING: A GUIDE TO RECREATIONAL CRABBING

Marine Advisory Bulletin Number 8

March, 1976

Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program

South Carolina Marine Resources Center

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Charleston, S. C. 29412

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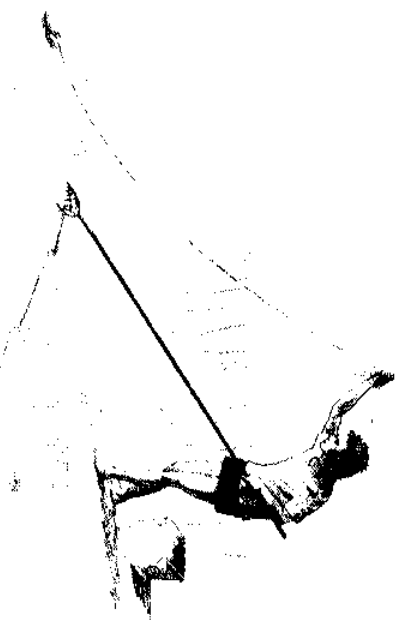
Catching

Of all the delicious-to-eat creatures living in the seas and marshes, probably none is more easily harvested by the beach-comber than the Blue Crab.

Found abundantly in the saltwater creeks of the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey to Florida, crabs can be caught easily by every member of the family with a minimum of equipment and skill. And the best crabbing spots are the readily accessible public boat ramps and fishing platforms found on many bridges throughout the coastal zone.

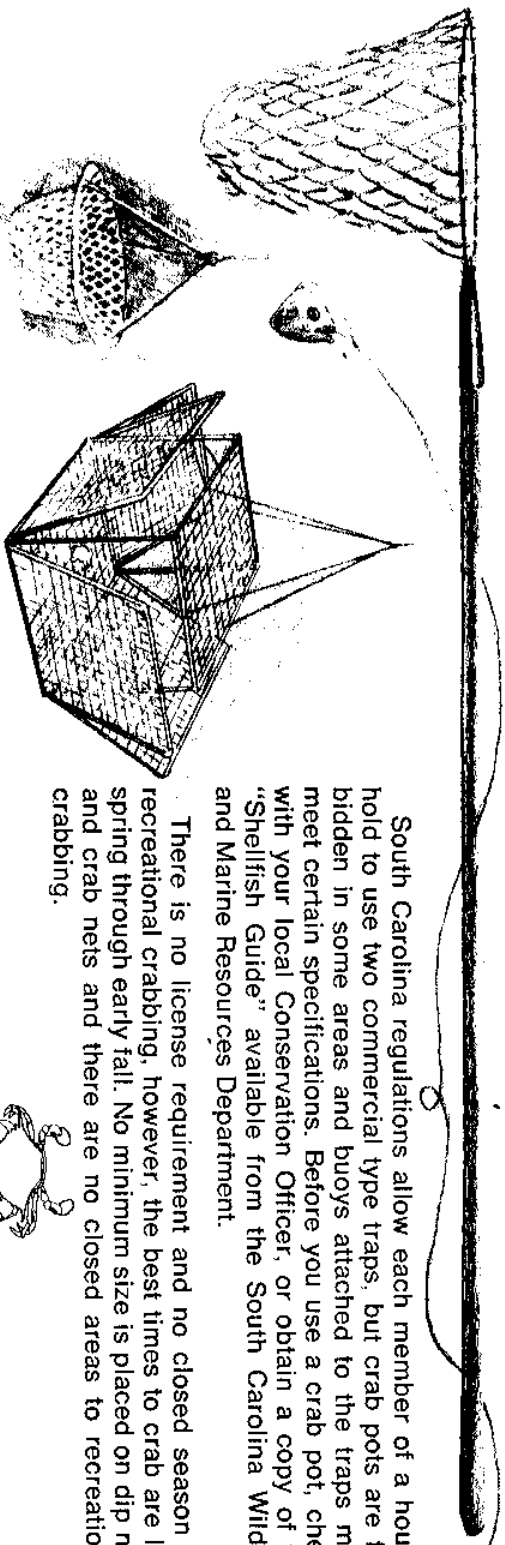
It is illegal to fish from many bridges in South Carolina, so make sure that fishing is allowed from the bridge you choose before fishing from that structure.

Crabbing in its simplest form consists of wading along the shallows with a long handled dip net and scooping up any crabs you see. With a baited line and your dip net, you can keep your feet dry and probably catch more crabs.



For this method you will need a length of stout cord with suitable bait tied to one end—chicken necks or fish heads do nicely. Throw the bait into the water and when you feel a nibble, s-l-o-w-l-y pull the bait to the surface, dipping up the crab with your dip net.

Circular crab nets and collapsible crab traps are available inexpensively and are especially useful when crabbing from a bridge or dock that is some distance above the water's surface.

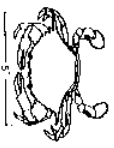


With these, the bait is tied securely to the center of the net and lowered into the water. Raising the trap after three to five minutes should provide you with several nice crabs.

Still another method of catching crabs is the use of commercial-type crab traps, which offer the advantage of letting you go about other activities while the crabs trap themselves!

South Carolina regulations allow each member of a household to use two commercial type traps, but crab pots are forbidden in some areas and buoys attached to the traps must meet certain specifications. Before you use a crab pot, check with your local Conservation Officer, or obtain a copy of the "Shellfish Guide" available from the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department.

There is no license requirement and no closed season for recreational crabbing, however, the best times to crab are late spring through early fall. No minimum size is placed on dip nets and crab nets and there are no closed areas to recreational crabbing.



Female crabs bearing eggs—called sponge crabs because the egg mass looks like a red sponge—may not be taken. If you accidentally catch a sponge crab, immediately throw it back in the water. It also is illegal to keep any crabs which measure less than 5 inches across the back from tip to tip.

Cooking

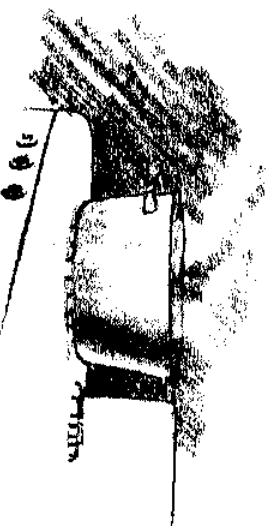
Now that you have a basket of crabs, the next step is to cook them.

While any seafood recipe book will abound with delicious ways to prepare crabs, almost all begin with cooked crab meat.

To cook crabs properly, place them in a large pot of boiling water to which you have added salt and your favorite seafood seasonings such as basil, vinegar, red pepper, etc. Commercially prepared seafood seasoning mixtures or "crab boils" are also good.

Let the water return to a boil and cook the crabs for approximately 20 minutes.

It is important that you boil your crabs while they are still alive. Any dead crabs should be discarded, and under no circumstances should the cooked crabs come in contact with any container or surfaces that have held uncooked crabs. Uncooked crabs may be contaminated with bacteria which could cause your boiled crabs to spoil.



Crabs can be kept alive prior to cooking if they are kept cool. They can be placed in a refrigerator or other cool place and safely kept until the next day.

Do not put live crabs in water as they will quickly use up the oxygen and die. **REMEMBER!!!** Throw away any dead crabs before you boil them.

If you wish to keep crab meat for future use, consult your Extension Home Economist for freezing hints. Only cooked crab meat should be frozen. **NEVER** freeze whole crabs, either cooked or uncooked.

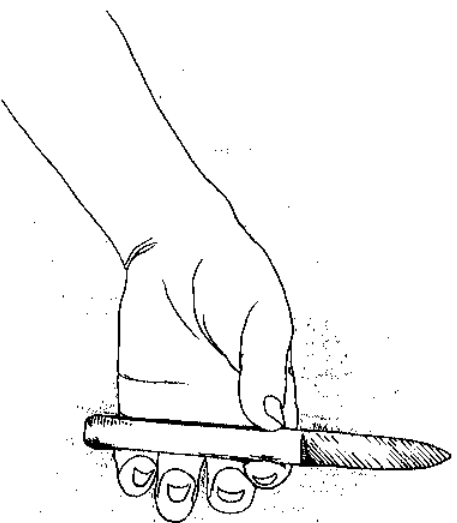
Cleaning

Sitting down before a pot of freshly boiled crabs, you may wonder how anyone could ever find anything edible in that spiny mass of points and legs.

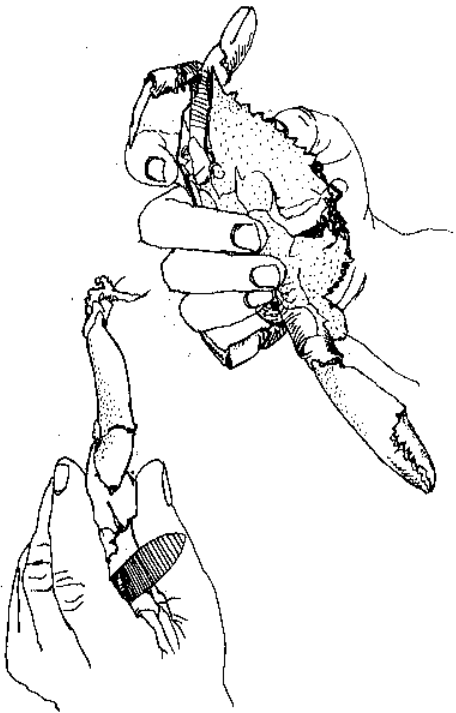
By following a few simple steps and using a crab knife properly, you will quickly become adept at picking crabs. An experienced crab-picker, like some of the employees at crab processing plants, can pick out anywhere from 4 to 7 pounds of crab meat in an hour!

If your first efforts fall a bit short of this, don't give up. With patience your skill will increase to a point where you may even be able to pick crabs faster than you can eat the meat!

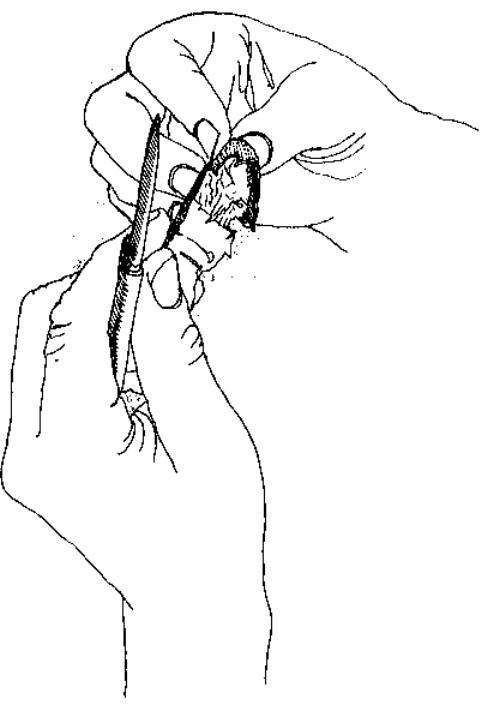
1. The secret to successful crab picking lies in the use of the crab knife. While special knives are available, any small, heavy knife can be used.



2. Remove the claws by pulling them away from the body. Save any meat attached to the end of the "arm".



3. Holding the crab knife near the end of the handle, crack the claws and remove the meat. If the meat does not come out easily, pry it out of the shell with the knife.



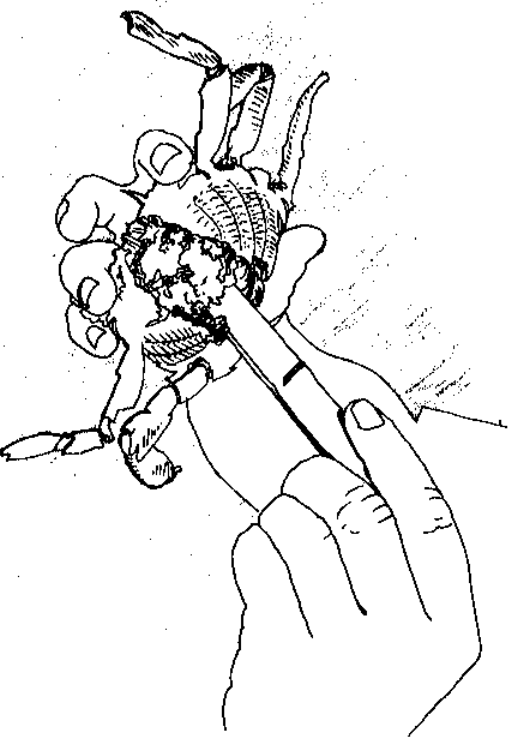
4. Grasp the shell near one of the spines and pull up on it, removing the back. Discard the back, which has no meat in it.



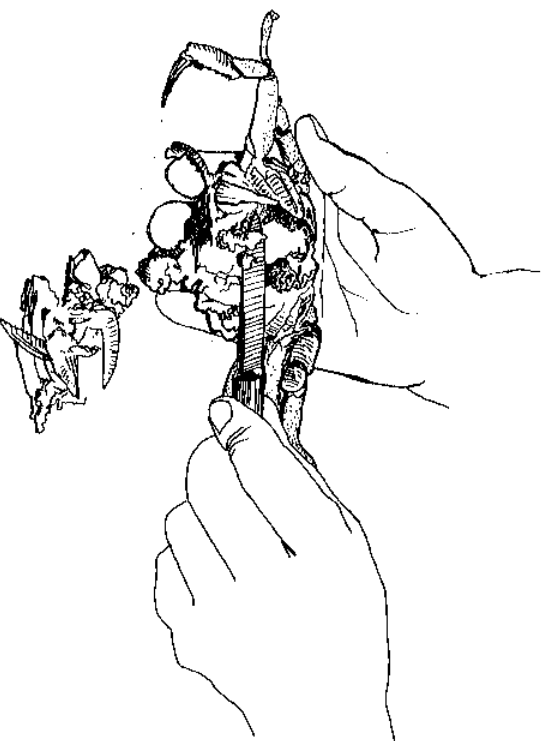
5. Once the back has been removed, the fat and the gills are clearly visible.



6. Using the knife, scrape away the yellowish material, called the fat, lying in the middle of the crab. Some people relish the fat, but most find it rather strong tasting.



7. Once the fat has been removed, the next step is to cut away the gills, which are the gray feathery structures found on either side. The gills are called the "dead man" in the low country and should not be eaten.



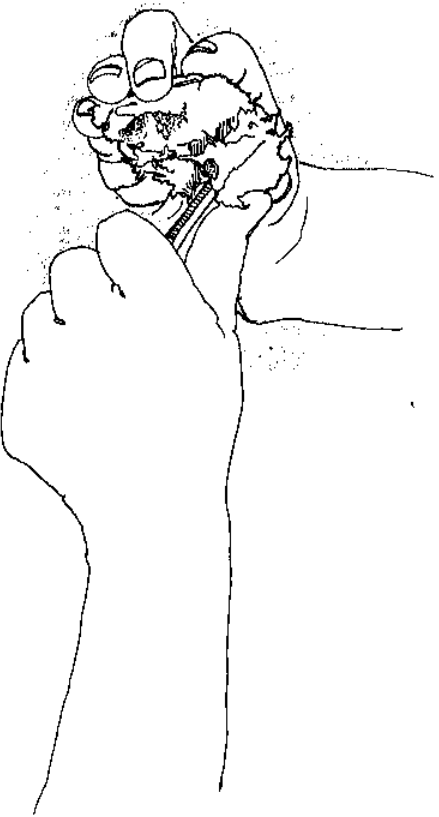
8. Cut away the walking legs and remove any bits of meat clinging to the cut ends.



9. Slice off the top right side of the body and set it aside. Do the same to the left side.



10. With the point of the knife remove the lump meat from the rear portion of the body. Now remove the meat from the remaining sections by prying upward with the knife.



11. Take one of the sides removed earlier and pick out the meat. Do the same to the other side.



Now, sit back, lick your fingers, and smack your lips—you have just picked your first Blue Crab.