

Fish Facts for Florida Consumers

Blue Crab

By Don E. Sweat



Blue Crab

A Seafood Delicacy

Like its crustacean cousins, shrimp and spiny lobsters, the blue crab ranks high on the list of seafood delicacies in Florida.

Although blue crab meat is available yearround in the pasteurized form, live crabs are seasonal and much more plentiful during the warm water months of the year.

Fresh or pasteurized cooked crab meat is usually available for purchase as lump, flake, or claw meat: lump meat consists of whole lumps from the large body muscles which operate the swimming legs; flake meat consists of small pieces of white meat from the body; claw meat consists of a brownish tinged meat from the claws.

Blue crabs in seafood markets usually are sold by the dozen. An average blue crab weighs about 1/3 pound with the edible portion quite low.

An experienced crab picker can produce about 2 1/4 ounces of meat from each pound of live blue crabs. This is about a 14 percent yield. The actual yield depends on the size of the individual crab and experience of the crab picker.

The consumer is probably better off to purchase the crab meat already prepared unless the picking is incorporated into a “crab boil” or “picnic type” activity. You can estimate a price comparison between fresh and pasteurized meat by studying the following example:

Pay \$10.00 per dozen
1 crab = 1/3 pound
Dozen crabs = 4 pounds

Yield from one pound of live crabs X Total pounds of live crabs = crab meat yield

14 x 4 pounds = .56 pounds meat

Cost per dozen ÷ Pounds of meat = Cost per pound of meat

\$10.00/ .56 = \$17.85 per pound

A pound of crab meat already prepared and selling for less than \$17.85 would be the best buy. If the prepared pound costs more than \$17.85, buy the dozen for \$10.00 and pick your own - if your labor is cheap and you have the time.



Donald E. Sweat, Marine Extension Agent, demonstrates the preparation of blue crabs.

Preparation

Blue crab recipes are available on-line at www.fl-seafood.com through the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Bureau of Seafood and Aquaculture. For basic preparation, cook live crabs in boiling, salted water for 12 to 15 minutes. Drain, cool and clean in the following manner.

1) Remove the claw and set aside for later use. Hold the crab firmly in one hand with the top shell up. Lift the top shell off with opposite hand (Figure 1).



Figure 1

2) Scrape out the internal organs and cut off the face (Figure 2).



Figure 2

3) Slice off the top of the inner skeleton (beneath the gills) on first one side and then the opposite and remove all exposed meat on these slices (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3

4) Place thumb over exposed backfin lump meat and carefully cut down and away the legs on both sides (Figure 5).



Figure 5

6) Hold the claw on a hard surface with its inside portion upward. Score the claw using a sharp blow with the hard edge of a knife blade near the pincers. Break the claw at the point of the score (Figure 7).



Figure 7

5) At the back of the crab on each side is the backfin lump of meat. Remove this backfin lump with the point of a knife (Figure 6). Remove the white flake meat from the other pockets with the point of the knife.



Figure 4



Figure 6

7) Use in this form for serving as crab fingers or remove the meat by clasping it with the thumb and fingers of one hand while pulling out the tendon with the fingers of the opposite hand (Figure 8). Crack the section to remove the meat from the remaining section of claw. **Pull** out the meat with the knife point or small fork.



Figure 8



Donald E. Sweat, Marine Extension Agent with the Florida Sea Grant College Program, serving Levy, Citrus, Hernando, Pasco and Pinellas counties, prepared this Sea Grant extension fact sheet.


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